

In Search for a Common Word

The Grand Mufti
Engages International Media

Compiled by
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Foreword

It is becoming increasingly obvious that one of the great tasks of Islam, as well as the world's other great religious traditions, lies in the need for engagement with the modern world. The contemporary representatives of Islam, its scholars and leaders, are faced with the great responsibility of guiding a centuries-old tradition, rich in heritage, complexity, and sophistication, into a new phase of its history. Too often, the voices that are heard in this confrontation with Islam and the modern world speak of inevitable conflict, clashes of civilizations, and the impossibility of convergence, cooperation and harmony. Less prominently known are the ideas of those who believe in, and work towards, achieving coexistence and understanding. It is with the goal of amplifying these latter voices in mind that this volume presents a collection of public interventions made by the current Grand Mufti of Egypt, Dr Ali Gomaa.

The Grand Mufti has been a consistent voice arguing for a determined and concerted effort to promote friendly relations between civilizations, religious traditions, and various sectors of society. He is of the firm belief that what is required for the flourishing of the global population is a sincere commitment to honest dialogue. According to Dr Gomaa, it is an obligation to respond proactively to the tensions of our world by working actively and methodically to ameliorate them, so as to replace instability with stability, hostility with friendship, and animosity with alliances. This sort of approach requires courage because it will inevitably be met with obstacles and hindrances, objections thrown up by those who profit, either materially or ideologically, from the persistence of conflict and crisis. In this regard, not only has the Mufti been a proponent of the concept of dialogue, he has also theorized the processes and psychologies that dialogue both requires and entails, as well as the motivations and commitments that will help it succeed.

Furthermore, Dr Gomaa is an active participant in a number of forums devoted to building bridges within communities. These include his co-chairmanship of the London C-1 World Dialogue, and his deep involvement with the Coexist Foundation. These extensive interfaith efforts have been recognized by an honorary doctorate from Liverpool Hope University, well known in the United Kingdom as an institution inspired by Catholic values.

His dialogue efforts have also extended to forums within the Muslim community, such as the Amman message, which have sought to marginalize sectarianism and the encroaching culture of castigation and anathematizing that have started to make inroads into portions of the Muslim community. He is a leading figure of the coalition of Muslim figures who have formed a united front to defend the diversity of a big-tent Islam, in opposition to the narrow-mindedness which wants to criticize anyone who exhibits even the slightest differences with one's own behavior.

In order to accomplish a more harmonious world, the Mufti has felt the need, as is obvious from a perusal of this work, to clearly articulate his firm opposition to extremist articulations of Islam who seek to reduce all of Muslim culture and society to a puritanical reading of the Qur'an and the Prophetic sunna, Islam's foundational texts. His outspoken criticism on personalities who find in everything a justification for further hatred and violence has led to a broader critique of the infiltration of these puritan trends into Egypt, and the Muslim community at large. But rather than just point to the problem, the Mufti has pinpointed its causes – including the proliferation of satellite channels, the pervasiveness of the internet and the deterioration of Muslim authority structures – and suggested remedies – such as the development of a greater presence on such media on the part of the legitimate inheritors of the Muslim tradition. This latter group is comprised, in the Egyptian case, of prominent graduates of the Azhar University. Another contribution of the articles collected here is the Mufti's insistence of a return to the glory of Azhar through an assertion of its traditional curriculum, which values difference of opinion as expanding the student's (and the community's) horizons; a commitment to ethics, which makes intellectual disagreement possible and keeps it civil, all the while reminding a scholar of his duty before his Lord; and spirituality, which ensures that every person keeps in mind the end goal of becoming a better person and developing one's soul through whatever enterprise he chooses, whether scholarship, business, government or the trades. What becomes evident through a reading of the chapters in this volume, is the Mufti's unwavering commitment to scholastic excellence within the parameters of the civility, ethics and spirituality he so values. This intellectual rigor, in his view, entails a proper Islamic engagement with the sciences that define modern civilization, including the empirical sciences, social sciences and humanities.

The goal must be to seriously tackle the issues of the world by making recourse to both the Islamic heritage and its long-standing contribution to humanity, as well as the advances that have made the modern world possible. Both must be taken in tandem, because neither can operate in isolation without creating a skewed world – either a textually puritan worldview, or a selfish materialistic outlook. Once this general framework is established, we will have paved the way to examine how, for example, Islamic conceptions of stewardship over natural resources, respect for women, concern for the least among us (the poor, minorities, etc.), and a constraint on excessiveness each have much to add to pressing contemporary discussions about the environment, society, government, and business.

What equally emerges from this volume is the Mufti's global reach. Not only is he an Egyptian, or Arab, figure, he has also gained wide acclaim as an interlocutor with the West. This is in no small part due to his attempts to find constructive solutions to the world's problems in a cooperative manner. As such, he has been in particularly good standing addressing Western countries with respect to their minority Muslim populations. Drawing inspiration from the Prophetic period when Muslims were minorities in Abyssinia and persecuted in Mecca, the Mufti has used current affairs such as the Swiss ban on minarets, or resurgent Islamophobia in Europe and the United States, as an opportunity to mend bridges and remind both sides of their indebtedness to the other given how intertwined the histories of Europe and Islam have been for centuries. It is rare that a personality of a stature in the Muslim world comparable to the Grand Mufti is capable of addressing such disparate and varied audiences.

This English-language volume is an attempt to gather together in one place, the Mufti's contributions towards debates current in both Islam and the Western world. Because this sort of discourse, even when it does happen, does so in Arabic, it is often outside the reach of English speakers. This book seeks to fill this gap. It is an opportunity to see a committed Muslim jurist and thinker at work, analyzing real phenomena, interacting with real people, and seeking to find real solutions to real problems.

*Dr. Ibrahim Negm
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Introductory Overview

The past few decades have witnessed a growing interest in Islam in the West which now stands at unprecedented levels. Unfortunately, this thirst for understanding has often been met with misinformation and even disinformation, rendering a great disservice to the Western public and making cooperation between Islamic civilization and the West on shared challenges more difficult. This wide-ranging collection of articles by and about Dr. Ali Gomaa, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, contributes to a sorely needed solution. In this brief introduction, we touch on some of the salient features of these articles and interviews in which the Mufti explains the authentic teachings of Islam in light of the challenges of the present-day situation.

Perhaps the best point of departure is the Mufti's approach to how Muslims and Westerners can live in peace and harmony with each other and join hands against those who seek to precipitate a clash of civilizations. I refer to his on-going contributions to the Common Word initiative, in which he played a foundational role, emphasizing love of God and love of neighbor as shared commandments for Christians and Muslims. He outlines the motivation behind the initiative in the context of globalization as well as practical challenges that the two communities should address together such as the environment, human rights, poverty, and violent extremism.

The latter issue is arguably the most pressing one for most Westerners. The Mufti points out, however, that the terrorists "*struck us before you – remember the death of Anwar El-Sadat*," suggesting that "*we are in the same boat*." He explains how and why terrorists are actually products of troubled environments and have inverted the orthodox understanding of jih.d, which is broadly defined as "*striving or making effort*" for the sake of God. This ranges from the inner struggle against our carnal soul to pursuing God's will in our daily lives to the outward defense of the Muslim community. Describing terrorists as *jihādīs* or *mujāhidūn* therefore validates their claim to legitimacy on one hand and implies that the war against terrorism is a war against Islam on the other. The Mufti consequently urges Western civil-society members and government officials not to employ terms that extremists use to describe themselves, arguing that the correct Quranic term for terrorism is *irjāf*, which denotes subversion and scare-mongering to bring quaking and commotion to society.

It is a capital crime which leads to damnation if not repented for and thus represents a powerful linguistic weapon in the ongoing intellectual battle for the minds of would-be terrorists. The Mufti maintains that violent versions of Islamic fundamentalism are paradoxically the other side of the coin of secular fundamentalism, with extremists combining secular thought and distorted interpretations of Islam in a syncretic manner. While the Mufti emphasizes the role of necessary intellectual conditions behind such extremism, he does not shy away from pointing out its necessary political conditions as well in terms of U.S. foreign policy . Of course, American politicians may deny that U.S. foreign policy plays any role in such extremism (President Bush, for example, adopted this position after 9/11).

Various Christian fundamentalists go further by claiming that extremists have the proper understanding of Islam (a view that President Bush rejected by declaring that al Qaeda inverted Islamic values). Finally, extremists like those tied to al Qaeda would deny any inversion of Islamic values while claiming to respond to U.S. foreign policy. These four possibilities and related discourse on the relations between religion, politics, and terrorism can be represented in a two-by-two matrix organized according to whether or not necessary political and intellectual conditions apply to violent extremism. The Mufti maintains that efforts in both domains are critical, since the combination of political and intellectual conditions creates the sufficient conditions for violent extremism. Failure to appreciate either can accordingly contribute to a cycle of violence. Hence, the urgent need for dialogue and education in the context of “A Common Word,” as the correct Quranic terminology for terrorism so clearly illustrates.

Collaboration with leading religious scholars in Egypt, the intellectual capital of the Arab world, is particularly important in this regard. Another application of “A Common Word” that the Mufti highlights is the environmental crisis, which he regards as the most urgent collective challenge today. He expands the concept of love of neighbor to include all of God’s creation, citing Islamic teachings that every creature has a face turned toward God independent of human beings, so that every creature has its own rights, which Islamic thought refers to as creation’s *aqq*, or due. All things hymn the praises of God, as the Qur’ān, the Bible, and other sacred texts remind us. Nature is therefore irreducible to its purely quantitative, analytical aspect, just as a book is irreducible to its weight or dimensions. The Mufti therefore

elaborates on the correspondence between the book of nature and the Qur'an as sacred texts conveying a message in Islamic thought, pointing out that the environmental crisis is much more than a question of religious ethics. It is a question of rediscovering the spiritual significance of the world of nature, and this is ultimately a matter of challenging modern science's claim to have a monopoly on knowledge. In this regard, the Mufti has been at the forefront of reviving the Islamic intellectual heritage to confront the modern desacralized worldview and its devastating environmental applications.

On a spectrum of philosophical/theological positions, the Mufti represents the "traditional middle" in the Islamic world. At one extreme are secular fundamentalists who completely reject religion as a normative force for guiding society (the aggressive secularism of Kemal Atatürk in modernizing Turkey is an example of this approach), and at the other extreme are militants who claim that anyone standing in the way of their very narrowly defined vision of Islam are legitimate targets of violence (much like the group that assassinated President Anwar Sadat). Of course, there are less extreme versions of each, but at the center of this spectrum are the silent majority of Muslims who view religion as the source of meaning and guidance for the inward and outward life, and for whom Islamic civilization offers a precious source of nourishment. This traditional middle represents the overwhelming majority of Muslims, with less than one hundredth of one percent (i.e., less than 0.01 percent, or less than one in every 10 thousand Muslims) in the militant category, and perhaps less than 10 percent in all other categories combined.

Since Islam asserts the universality of revelation, the 90 percent of Muslims in the traditional middle is in fact anxious to partner with fellow people of scripture on shared challenges that the Mufti outlines. Conversely, "A Common Word" is crucial for greater Western understanding of this traditional Islamic middle, sometimes erroneously conflated with aggressive fundamentalism by the West, to avoid marginalizing the very group that could provide the antidote to extremism in all its forms. It is therefore appropriate that the volume begins with the Mufti's views on the need for dialogue and its principles in the Quran and sunnah, or wonts, of the Prophet of Islam. Properly understood, dialogue does not involve compromising religious principles, as some erroneously fear. The purpose of dialogue is to increase respect and understanding, realizing common ground to

cooperate for the common good. Theological differences are a matter for specialists in academic settings from this point of view. Accordingly, broader public dialogue does not seek to syncretize or proselytize. The Mufti alludes to other issues in this chapter as part and parcel of the current dialogue, including extremism, women's issues, and the environmental crisis, which he up takes later in greater detail.

Chapter two deals with Islam in the modern world and highlights the nature of Islamic law in relation to modernity, a subject which is very difficult for most Westerners to understand since Christ did not promulgate a divine law, and religious law in the West developed in a very different manner than it did in Islam. But the Mufti explains how the philosophy of Islamic law gives it far greater flexibility than most Westerners recognize, highlighting the need to distinguish between form and substance when assessing modern constitutions in the Islamic world from an Islamic legal perspective. This has tremendous political implications which the Mufti illustrates with a valuable survey of how Islamic law is applied in various Muslim majority countries. Central to this understanding is that Islamic law is both a methodology and a collection of legal positions in which properly issuing a fatwa, or religious opinion/ruling, requires specialized training. *"When each and every person's unqualified opinion is considered a fatwa,"* The Mufti warns, *"we lose a tool that is of the utmost importance for reigning in extremism and preserving the flexibility and balance of Islamic law."*

Chapter three applies these principles to the contemporary political situation in Egypt. The Mufti points out that Egypt is a profoundly religious society, and that the question is not whether or not religion will manifest itself in the public square, but how. He applies the principles of Islamic law discussed in chapter two to this post-revolutionary environment, highlighting the role of Al-Azhar University, the most prestigious Islamic university in the Arab world and the oldest still-functioning university in the world (founded in 971 in Cairo), in seeking the common good and eschewing partisan politics. In this regard, the Mufti carefully distinguishes between polity and politics, which has monumental implications for the role of religion in the public square and facilitating a smooth transition vital to the country's future.

Chapter four addresses terrorism in various contexts ranging from sectarianism in post-revolutionary Egypt to the shootings at Fort Hood in Texas. The Mufti presents the aforementioned argument distinguishing between *jihād* and *irjāf* in this chapter.

Chapter five examines the challenge of Muslim minorities living in the West, particularly in light of rising sentiment to curtail the freedom to practice religion such as the Swiss ban of building minarets.

The Mufti poses several important questions in this regard that require interfaith collaboration to answer, namely:

How are religiously defined minorities and immigrant communities best provided for in ways that respect their needs and those of the wider communities around them?

How is integration to be managed without threatening assimilation? Are there general principles of good practice we can all adopt in regard to what it means in practical terms to uphold the freedom of religion and the freedom to practice one's religion as well?

How can the religiously informed conscience find its place in our various societies? The Mufti maintains that "*it will take courage for each religious tradition to truly hear the criticisms and fears of others, yet we must find ways to facilitate serious engagement with the fears that exist.*"

Chapter six concerns appropriate Muslim responses to offenses against Islam, particularly in light of the rising wave of hate speech directed against the Prophet Muhammad. The Mufti has developed a manual on how to react to such hate campaigns, mounting a veritable "peace offensive." He states that, "As much as we vehemently condemn the heinous reckless acts of spreading hatred and sewing discord among religious communities through making belligerent movies and drawing satirical caricatures and the like, we are equally opposing the violent reaction of Muslims who were carried away with their unrestrained feelings of anger and went over board to jeopardize innocent lives, damage properties, burn flags and desecrate other faith's religious symbols."

Not only are such acts completely contrary to Islamic teachings, they are counterproductive in tarnishing the image of Islam. This chapter begins with the aforementioned manual on properly responding to such hate campaigns and concludes with a series of articles that the

Mufti wrote in response to them which were published in widely circulated international newspapers.

Chapter seven concerns women's issues such as female genital mutilation, the Islamic perspective on women as heads of state, the rights of women in both marital choice and divorce, domestic violence, polygyny, and unequal inheritance. The Mufti dispels many misconceptions surrounding these important issues, pointing out that Islam "is a religion which recognizes the equal status of men and women in the eyes of God, as is attested by numerous passages in the Holy Qur'an." Muslim women can therefore assert their rights within their religion (a fact consistent with Gallup survey data that Muslim women value both their religion and their rights), suggesting that the "feminism vs. fundamentalism" debate is misconstrued.

The next chapter is arguably the most challenging if one does not have a background in Islamic studies, since it concerns Islam and the development of new sciences. Indeed, knowledge plays a soteriological function in Islam, which is based on the doctrine of Unity (tawhid). Islamic civilization therefore integrated the sciences of pre-Islamic civilizations into its perspective, drawing from and building upon these sciences to make Arabic a major language of international scientific and philosophical discourse. Recovering this ability to integrate and generate the intellectual sciences in the Islamic world today is the challenging theme of this chapter.

Chapter nine focuses on Islamic causes such as the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the spiritual significance of Jerusalem for Muslims, which have important implications for the aforementioned necessary political conditions behind violent forms of extremism. And chapter ten concerns global issues such as the aforementioned environmental crisis, the Mufti's ruling on weapons of mass destruction from an Islamic legal perspective, and ethical concerns introduced by the internet and social networking. Reflecting on the multifaceted personality of Sheikh Ali Gomaa, a number of feature articles and profiles have been written about him by international media, which are presented in chapter eleven. As stated by some international journalists, Sheikh Ali Gomaa embodies hope in a progressive and tolerant future, counterpointing many and varying hardline views. He represents a pristine example of a leading intellectual Muslim scholar who has combined between being faithful to the intellectual heritage of Islamic

tradition while keeping a close eye on the ever changing circumstances that Muslims are subjected to in their modern lives. Finally, chapter twelve contains French and German translations of various articles by the Mufti in international newspapers. In all the different issues that Sheikh Ali Gomaa tackles, he shows how to apply the full resources of the Islamic intellectual and legal tradition to the exigencies of our time. We therefore pray that this volume enjoys a wide readership in both the Islamic world and the West.

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Brief Biography on Dr Ali Gomaa

Sheikh Ali Gomaa was born on March 3rd 1952 in Bani Suwaif, Upper Egypt. He was raised in a pious household that respected knowledge. His father, a lawyer specializing in personal status shariah law, transferred his love of books to his son whose private library now boasts over 30,000 titles and is sought out by students and researchers from around the world in need of rare texts.

Sheikh Ali began memorizing the Quran at the age of ten and, although he did not go to religious schools, by the time he graduated from high school he had studied the six canonical collections of hadith as well as Maliki jurisprudence. When it came time for him to go to college he had the choice to enter either the faculty of engineering or the faculty of commerce. He chose commerce since it was a field that would allow him the spare time to continue his religious studies while he was in school. After graduating from college, Sheikh Ali enrolled in al-Azhar University. During his first year in al-Azhar he memorized many of the foundational texts that other students who had gone through the al-Alzhar high school system had already encountered. These included works in jurisprudence, Arabic grammar, Quranic recitation, and hadith methodology. After completing a second bachelor's degree from al-Azhar in 1979, Sheikh Ali enrolled in a master's degree program at the same university's department of shariah and law. He obtained his master's degree in 1985 followed by a PhD from the same department in 1988.

In addition to his official studies, Sheikh Ali spent time with many sheikhs and masters of the shariah sciences and the spiritual path outside of the university setting. The most influential of these sheikhs was the Moroccan hadith scholar and Sufi Sheikh Abdullah bin Siddiq al-Ghumari who considered Sheikh Ali to be one of his most accomplished students.

Other scholars that Sheikh Ali studied with include: Sheikh Abd al-Fattah Abu Ghuda, Sheikh Muhammad Abu Nur Zuhayr, Sheikh Jad al-Rabb Ramadan Goma', Sheikh al-Husayni Yusif al-Shaykh, Sheikh Muhammad Yasin al-Fadani, Sheikh Abd al-Jalil al-Qarnishawi al-Maliki, Sheikh al-Azhar Sheikh Jad al-Haqq Ali Jadd al-Haq, Sheikh Abd al-'Aziz al-Zayat, Sheikh Ahmed Muhammad Mursi al-Naqshibandi, Sheikh Muhammad Zaki Ibrahim, and Sheikh Muhammad Hafidh al-Tijani.

Before his appointment as Grand Mufti of Egypt, Sheikh Ali was Professor of Juristic Methodologies at al-Azhar University. In addition to teaching classes on the university campus, in the mid-1990's Sheikh Ali reestablished the tradition of giving lessons in the al-Azhar mosque. For a decade, Sheikh Ali could be found in one of the side rooms of the mosque teaching jurisprudence, juristic methodology, hadith and its sciences, theology, and spirituality from the early morning until noon six days a week. These lessons were open to the public and a number of students who had adopted an extremist approach to religion attended regularly. Sheikh Ali engaged these students challenging their understanding of Islam and offering alternative interpretations to extremist views. As a result, many of these students renounced extremism and embraced the more moderate vision of Islam that Sheikh Ali taught.

A close circle of young religious scholars who had adopted his approach soon formed around Sheikh Ali and now that much of his time is taken up with official duties, this group of scholars continues the tradition of giving informal lessons in the al-Azhar mosque. In 1998 Sheikh Ali began delivering the Friday sermon at Cairo's Sultan Hasan Mosque, one of the city's grandest and most beautiful examples of Mamluk architecture. His sermons drew a crowd of hundreds, many of whom would remain after the prayer to attend his public lesson and question and answer session. In the ten years since he began delivering sermons there, Cairenes from all walks of life have been drawn to Sultan Hasan to hear his message that emphasizes mercy, intelligence, and understanding when confronting the difficulties of the contemporary world.

In 2003 Sheikh Ali was appointed Grand Mufti of Egypt. Since taking on the position he has revolutionized the process of issuing fatwas in Egypt transforming Dar al-Ifta from an institution that was the extension of one individual (the Grand Mufti) to a modern institution with a fatwa council and a system of checks and balances. Sheikh Ali has also added a technological aspect to the institution by developing a sophisticated website and a call center through which people can request fatwas even if they are unable to come to the institution personally.

Over the last five years Sheikh Ali has overseen the issuance of many important, and some controversial, fatwas all of which share the common characteristic of striving to show the continued relevance of Islam for people living in the 21st century. The methodology according to which this is carried out can be characterized by a profound respect for the intellectual product of the past accompanied by a realization of its shortcomings, when they exist, and an understanding of the specific needs the times in which we live. Sheikh Ali is a prolific author and writer on Islamic issues and he writes a weekly column in the Egyptian al-Ahram newspaper in which he discusses matters of current interest and religion.

Chapter 1: Dialogue

Key positions on Dialogue:

- The philosophy of dialogue has deep roots within the authentic Islamic tradition which promotes the principle of conviviality and yielded a moral and humanistic civilization encompassing plurality of religions, philosophies and civilizations.
- The cosmopolitan world view of Islam does not consider the Islamic civilization as superior to the Persian, Greek, Indian or Chinese but creates opportunities for mutual benefit and all who work towards the constructive development of humanity should be considered as our partners.
- Both the Quran and the prophetic traditions emphasize on the process of exploration and coming to know one another to reach a common ground which is a desideratum of all dialogue and lays the groundwork for mutual cooperation based on the principle of faith in God and good relations with neighbors.
- Conducting a constructive dialogue requires equal and equally willing partners on both sides.
- Dialogue should stem from the recognition of identities and specificities and remains respectful without seeking to inflame hostilities or to dominate the other.
- Dialogue should be based on respect for religious plurality and cultural diversity to avoid leading to one sided conversation.
- Dialogue is not about defeating others and winning over arguments but rather about understanding and learning about others.
- Constructive dialogue should not remain within academic circles and intellectual milieu as the aim is not to preach the choir but rather to build bridges of understanding among people of different civilizations.
- The rising trend of Islamophobia is troubling as it impedes efforts at starting a genuine dialogue in the first place.

- The cultivation of a genuine appreciation for the position, commitment and background of the other party is a crucial factor for a successful dialogue.

Articles & News of the Grand Mufti on the Issue of Dialogue

The Radical Middle: Building Bridges between the Muslim and Western Worlds

Source: United Nations Chronicle

In the views of many, the contemporary world in which we live appears to be marked most prominently by the emergence of what is regularly referred to as “a clash of civilizations”. Proponents of the discourse of a clash have sought confirmation of their views by pointing to the increasing hostility and animosity between cultural regions—most obviously between the Islamic and Western worlds—that has defined the last quarter of the twentieth and the first decade of the twenty-first centuries.

The long list of incidents that have revealed the intensifying tension between the Muslim and Western worlds over the past few years is countless. The terrorist attacks of 9/11, the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan, and the interminable conflict between Israelis and Palestinians are merely the highest profile examples of a global state of affairs whose ramifications extend to even the very local and regional levels. One may point to the rising Islamophobic sentiment in other parts of the world which finds expression in such senseless acts as the burning of copies of the Qur'an to express hatred towards Islam. Nor does this sort of prejudice fail to make its way into governmental policy, as is evidenced by the relative success of far-right political parties in Europe who are intent on marginalizing their Muslim communities.

On the other side, we also see a growing suspicion and reticence on the part of Arabs and Muslims to engage with Westerners on matters that may help develop their own societies. It is my view, however, that no matter how pessimistic the landscape seems to be, we must not allow ourselves to concede to the inevitability of a trajectory which ends

in the proverbial clash of civilizations. Further, it is an obligation to respond proactively to the tensions of our world by working actively and methodically to ameliorate them, so as to replace instability with stability, hostility with friendship, and animosity with alliances. In this regard, allow me to recognize the efforts of many international dialogue forums and institutions including the United Nations in bringing all sorts of people to the table to engage in genuine intercultural dialogue over the past few decades. Their commitment to cross-cultural understanding is truly commendable.

From the Islamic perspective, what is required is a proper understanding of the nature and purpose of dialogue with the other, a conscious effort to rebuild trust among different parties, and the emphasis and discovery of points of commonality. These goals are part and parcel of a larger philosophy of dialogue based on the authentic Islamic tradition, an understanding, and application, which is essential to a harmonious future for the world inhabited by all civilizations and cultures. Islam established a moral and humanistic civilization that encompassed a plurality of religions, philosophies, and civilizations which contributed immensely to Muslim society. We see ourselves as a people who have absorbed a multiplicity of civilizations; we have been exposed to and assimilated the great civilizations of the Persians, Indians, Chinese, and Greeks into our cultural and intellectual life, and we benefited from all of them as well as contributed to them. Islamic civilization places people and worshippers above places of worship.

This humanitarian and cosmopolitan world view does not allow us to consider ourselves as superior to other people. We are proud of our civilization, but we do not reject other civilizations; rather, all who work towards the constructive development in the world should be considered as our partners. Dialogue is a responsibility that accrues to Muslims by virtue of the nature of their religion. What we have learned about Islam has been taken from the clear, pristine, and scholarly understanding of the faith and not from the self-claimed, who have attempted to set themselves up as religious authorities even though they lack the scholarly qualifications for making valid interpretations of religious law and morality. Muslims believe that Islam is the last Message until the Day of Judgment and, as such, is addressed to all humankind. These two properties are the basis for the universality of Islam and require that Muslims engage in dialogue in the best of ways.

As the Qur'an instructs, "*Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the best way*" (Al-Nahl: 125). Islam is, indeed, an open world view which never seeks to erect barriers between Muslims and others. Muslims must be driven by the principle of conviviality, living together in harmony, and not be intent on converting every non-Muslim, for Allah Himself has made clear that "*There is no compulsion in religion*" (Al-Baqara: 256).

Interfaith dialogue does not need to conclude with a winner and a loser. The purpose of dialogue should not be to convert others, but rather to share with them one's principles. Sincere dialogue should strengthen one's faith while breaking down barriers. The Qur'an makes it clear that the attitude of the Muslim should be "*Whosoever wants, let them believe; and whosoever wants, let them disbelieve*" (Al-Kahf: 29).

When Muslims turn to the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet they will find that dialogue—and not competition—is what is required of them. Dialogue is a process of exploration and coming to know the other, as much as it is an example of clarifying one's own positions. Therefore, when one dialogues with others, what is desired is to explore their ways of thinking, so as to correct misconceptions in our own minds and arrive at common ground. This common ground is the desideratum of all dialogue, and lays the groundwork for mutual cooperation based on the principles of faith in God and good relations with neighbours. Indeed, dialogue is a form of jihad, a struggle in the path of Allah. As we have seen, the value of dialogue is taught in the Qur'an itself, as well as in the prophetic example, but equally, the long history of Muslims bears witness to the importance of dialogue in the Islamic tradition.

As I have argued previously in many forums, the quest for understanding and trust that underlies any dialogue is a process that requires equal and equally willing partners on both sides. The world is in dire need of forums which facilitate genuine dialogue in a shrinking world—a dialogue that stems from the recognition of identities and specificities; a dialogue that remains respectful and does not seek to inflame hostilities or dominate the other; a dialogue that is itself based upon a respect for religious plurality and cultural diversity; a dialogue that does not turn into a one-sided conversation. Dialogue from my perspective is thus not about trying to defeat others, but about

understanding and learning about them. As the Qur'an states, God has created us into nations and tribes so that we may learn about each other (Al-Hujurat: 13).

It has long been my view that engaging in such a constructive dialogue should be one of our highest priorities, which is a powerful tool in conflict prevention, management, and resolution. A truly constructive dialogue maintains boundaries of respect and tolerance. The necessity of dialogue is based upon a vision of intercultural relations which stresses tolerance, understanding and conscientious action. Though there will always be attempts to disturb the peaceful relations between Islam and the West, the appropriate response lies not in attack or defence—two distasteful actions—but in calling towards points of commonality. This course of action has its basis on the famous Qur'anic dictum that Muslims must call other believers to "*a common word between us and you*" (Al-Imran: 64).

Once this dialogue is underway and meeting with success amongst the participating parties, it is important to remember that it cannot simply remain within a narrow elite of specialists in academic and intellectual circles. This would be futile and counterproductive, as the final goal must always be to construct bridges of understanding between the peoples of the different civilizations. Dialogue must be activated and practiced and should not remain enclosed within the walls of conference rooms. Rather, dialogue must demystify religious differences to everyday people and help explain the divine wisdom behind religious diversity.

A crucial factor in achieving success in a dialogue is the cultivation of a genuine appreciation for the position, commitment, and background of the other party. This means, of course, that a commitment to true dialogue as a viable intellectual approach may take on a myriad of forms, each tailored to the particular circumstances of the dialoguing parties, their relationship to each other in global affairs, and the relative proximity of their religious or intellectual traditions. In Egypt, for example, I have always tried to focus on the historic, geographic, and religious commonalities between Muslim and Coptic compatriots, in order to pinpoint areas of fruitful contact in the past, as well as the potential for this contact to grow, thereby deepening the harmonious relations between Muslims and Christians.

In the wider Islamic World, sectarianism has unfortunately made something of a comeback, and so I have signed, along with many distinguished scholars from both the East and the West, an important document titled The Amman Message drawing on Islamic principles and fatwas and opinions from previous Muslim luminaries to urge Sunnis, Shias and all other denominations and orientations to set their differences aside and work for the common good, recognizing that the differences between them are but secondary matters and do not impinge on the fundamentals of a common faith. I have also participated in a number of organized initiatives at the global level. These included interfaith dialogues with the Catholic Church, the Archbishop of Canterbury, as well as other leaders of the Abrahamic religions under the auspices of the Coexist Foundation. In addition, I co-chair with the Bishop of London C-1 World Dialogue, an institution devoted to better relations between the Islamic and Western worlds. The hope is that the proliferation of such organizations may contribute to the spread of a culture of dialogue which will ease the conflictual nature of the times.

One of the most important contributions made by the Western world to the global culture is the concept of modernity itself. As has often been noted, modernity is not simply a particular epoch in the history of the world, but also a set of very large and important structural and material changes affecting people globally. It is a condition in which we all now live, and which we must confront with the intellectual resources of not only the modern world, but also our traditions and heritage (*turath*). It has too often been the case that to think about modernity has been to limit oneself to the European experience—the changing economic configurations, the wars of religion, and emerging political arrangements—as a model for how modernity should be understood the world over. However, as the world becomes increasingly interconnected through technological advances, we are now beginning to appreciate the differing experiences of the world’s many cultures in their encounters with the complex of institutions and ideas that we identify as modernity.

In particular, we have the new concept of “alternative modernities”, a term which goes a long way in representing the diversity of the world in encountering new realities. So, whereas it was previously thought that to be modern meant to distance oneself from religion and tradition, it is becoming evident that, throughout the centuries,

community leaders have found innovative and creative ways to relate religion and tradition to new advances in technology, politics, and economics so as to provide pragmatic guidance in an ever-changing world. That is to say, it was, and is, possible to remain authentic to one's religious traditions while still being a modern person. From the Muslim viewpoint, these commitments must be recognized by all involved, if we are to engage in a truly fruitful dialogue. This viewpoint stands in stark contrast to the eccentric and rebellious attitudes that have been repeatedly associated with Islam in recent years. In fact, these radical attitudes stand as an offence to the humane tradition of learning that characterizes Islamic history.

Instead of seeking to create havoc and chaos in the world, Islam facilitates the application of the wisdom and moral strength of religion in changing and uncertain times. It is through adopting this approach that an authentic, contemporary, moderate, and tolerant Islam can provide solutions to the problems confronting the Muslim world today. One of the problems faced by religious communities today is the issue of authority. In both Islam and other religions, we are witnessing a phenomenon in which lay people without a sound foundation in religious learning have attempted to set themselves up as religious authorities, even though they lack the scholarly qualifications for making valid interpretations of religious law and morality. It is this eccentric and rebellious attitude towards religion that opens the way for extremist interpretations of Islam that have no basis in reality. Furthermore, and this must be stressed, none of these extremists have been educated in Islam in genuine centres of Islamic learning. They are, rather, products of troubled environments and have subscribed to distorted and misguided interpretations of Islam that have no basis in traditional Islamic doctrine.

Their aim is purely political and has no religious foundation. It is to create havoc and chaos in the world. It behooves me to comment, however, that the project to rebuild a world of harmony and cooperation is a two-way street which requires the participation of all parties. This is why the rise in Islamophobia and the growing stature of Islamophobes in positions of greater authority is so troubling. Demagogic attitudes towards Muslims and Islam, and an unwillingness to understand them, do more than impede efforts at genuine dialogue. They fail to allow for the possibility of their getting started in the first

place. In this regard, I would be remiss if I did not comment on the truly corrosive effects of some sensationalist media, whose profit-at-all-costs attitude does serious harm to the cause of world peace by stoking the flames of hatred, fear, and bigotry in the minds of ordinary people.

Building a world of the sort I imagine requires the participation of leaders from all communities, both religious and otherwise, to express their faith and trust in their Muslim counterparts. There will be no progress until we work together in faith and trust. There is no weapon more powerful against all sorts of extremism than the right education.

Links:

[http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/chronicle/home/archive/
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Five Questions from America

Questions from America By the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Shaykh Ali Gomaa

Source: Search for Common Ground

ARTICLE I

I have received six questions from several individuals working for the Common Ground News Service that, being unlike what preoccupies our fellow Egyptian journalists with their attempts to construe religious questions in terms of controversial issues for the dailies and absent that characteristic whereby a writer does not care to read about or study his subject-matter, have made me remember again and again – as a consolation to my heart and the hearts of Muslims – that: “There is no power nor strength save in God” and “Verily, to God we belong and unto Him we return.” For these were not questions dealing with the permissibility for women to pluck the eyebrow or the ruling concerning statues in Islamic law; they dealt rather with the following questions, which we will attempt to clarify to the best of our ability – relying on God – in this present article and in forthcoming articles:

- What are the most misunderstood Islamic principles that cause alarm to the international community today?
- Is there room for greater cooperation between Islamic scholars and experts on the one hand, and imams and other religious leaders in Muslim societies on the other?
- How can ijtihad (or ongoing reevaluation in accordance with the principles of Islamic juristic reasoning) by religious leaders and academics help shift public opinion toward the real tradition of Islam and toward better relations between East and West?
- To what extent can Muslim scholars in the West contribute to a better understanding of Islam’s principles all-round, especially Islamic sacred law or shari’ah?

- What role can individual ijtihad play in people's lives without altering its specialized qualifications?

Reading these questions, I feel as though I am before an intellect that thinks like the early Muslims used to, and as did Muslims throughout history prior to the chaos of this modern period in which people neither read nor reflect. I feel I am before an intellect resembling the one in the texts, marginal notes and commentaries of the traditional sciences taught at the University of al-Azhar; an intellect that does not stop short at particulars but considers the principles involved, that does not turn questions into disputations, that looks to the future, accepts the Other and their culture, and attempts to transcend both past and present.

It is precisely this intellect that has been especially stifled since the arrival of journalism no matter what its coloring: the yellow and the black, the clever and the idiotic, all these modern colors which crowd the space beneath various headlines. Again I remind myself: "*Verily, to God we belong and unto Him we return*" and "*God will enrich us out of His bounties, He and His Messenger.*"

I struggled with my pen -- should I respond to those Egyptian journalists or lay the groundwork for answers to these questions from America, in the hope that they will reach the other side of the ocean and benefit the people there, helping to cultivate the earth and contribute to human thought. Perhaps they will be a brick in the project of building a bridge between East and West. And perhaps I will pray for the guidance of our Egyptian brethren, for the illumination of the eyes of their hearts, and for their health and prosperity, in particular considering that a large number of them are now octogenarians. Let me pray then: Our Lord, illuminate the eyes of their hearts. We beseech thee and pray to thee, O Sovereign Good, in the words of Thy Chosen Prophet 'Our Lord, guide my people for they are without knowledge.'

In response to question one, regarding the fundamental principles of Islam that have been most seriously misunderstood thereby causing alarm over international peace and cooperation, I would like to mention four such principles. First, the absoluteness of the Qur'an. The Qur'an, according to Muslims, is a Book revealed by God Most High to His Prophet. God preserved its letters and words from corruption, and it remains in the same form in which it was revealed and

in its totality. Muslims cannot change a single letter of it or the position of a word, nor substitute a word, nor strike out a word from it. They cannot object to anything in it without exception. For them, it is valid for every time and place, for all conditions and for all humanity. Because of this, Muslims believe that it is always applicable. Now the Qur'an is not a book of abstractions but contains rather two types of text: one whose meaning is unquestionable, and one whose meaning is probabilistic. The unquestionable text is that in which no two people differ, as dictated by the rules of the Arabic language that have been transmitted to us and upon which there is agreement. Concerning these, we do not find any disagreement about their meaning between Muslims of the East and West, or between those of earlier and later times. The verses whose meaning is probabilistic, however, have led to a variety of understandings based on various linguistic usages. They have resulted in numerous schools of Islamic thought including theological and juridical schools. This is an area suitable for *ijtihad*, constituting as it were the branches of knowledge, whereas its principles are represented by the unquestionable text. All this applies in the context of the belief and creed, *shari'ah*, or ethics.

Such a Holy Book is not in the experience of the West. Instead, we see that it is the purview of the eminent Church Doctors to correct what scholarly and other evidence suggest to them is wrong in their Book by modifying the text, deleting words, or changing their position. They have no objection to doing so and consider it permissible as long as it takes place officially and under the auspices of the proper authority for making such changes, corrections, and improvements. Muslims cannot imagine something like this happening to their Book and no Muslim, whoever they are, has the authority to change a single letter in this Book which has been transmitted down to us in every way – in written form and orally – in a single tongue, namely Arabic.

If other Books in other religions, however, are treated similarly to what one finds in the West, it is as a result of the loss of the original copies of the books in their original language. Indeed, changes may also occur in translations of the Qur'an also, in which case it is acceptable to object to errors there as well, and seek to correct them or change them – but always with reference to the Arabic text. The existence of a Holy Book with an unaltered text, in the original Arabic in this case, is a fact that many in the world fail to understand. Some have even searched in various works, taking a word from here or there in an

attempt to establish the occurrence of a change in the Noble Qur'an. The existence of these apocrypha, however, in books of history, or law, or in narrations is itself a testament to the truth of Muslim belief concerning the Qur'an since these have not affected the text of the Qur'an whatsoever.

We find but one text throughout the centuries, unaltered by human shortcomings or mistakes in recitation. So the absoluteness of the Qur'an is the most important principle that has been severely misunderstood, thereby causing alarm in the international community which perhaps views its non-changeability less favorably than do Muslims, who take pride in this very fact and find comfort in it.

ARTICLE II

The second misunderstood principle I want to mention relates to the universality of the message, and refers to the fact that Islam came as a universal call to the people of all times and places. This is not the case for many other religions, at least not for the majority of them, although Christianity, after the Apostle Paul, did gain this characteristic. Indeed, the prophets of old were only sent to their own people until the Beloved [of God], Muhammad – may God send His Blessings and Peace upon him and his family – was sent to all of mankind. God Most High says: "*We have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin), but most men understand not.* (34:28)" And He said: "*We sent thee not save as a mercy for the worlds.* (21:107)"

This principle has given birth to a number of concepts including the concept of an Islamic Community (ummah) consisting of the community of Believers who believe in the Qur'an and its Prophet, and who follow him; and the community of the Called which includes all of mankind even those as yet unborn. This understanding creates in the Muslim a sense of brotherhood with his fellow man. See the example of Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law and the fourth caliph -- may God be pleased with him – when he wrote to Malik bin al-Ashtar whom he had appointed over Egypt: "Do not behave towards them as if you are a voracious and ravenous beast and as if your success lies in devouring them. Remember, Malik, that amongst your subjects there are two kinds of people: those who have the same religion as you have

-- they are brothers to you -- and those who have religions other than yours, and they are human beings like you. Men of either category suffer from the same weaknesses and disabilities that human beings are inclined to: they commit sins, indulge in vices either intentionally, or foolishly and unintentionally, without realizing the enormity of their deeds. Let your mercy and compassion come to their rescue and help in the same way and to the same extent that you expect Allah (God) to show mercy and forgiveness to you."

The Muslim also understands from the concept of the Community that humanity from the first of creation constitutes One Community. "And, verily, this Community of yours is one single Community, since I am the Sustainer of you all: remain, then, conscious of Me! (23:52)". Because of this, Muslims accept pluralism, even if some may view non-Muslims as being mistaken. The judgment of this error, however, is for God to make on the Day of Resurrection.

The Muslim cooperates and coexists in this worldly life with the people around him, and the history of Islam testifies to the truth of this. Muslims never exterminated peoples or compelled them to enter Islam by force. All religions had a place within the bosom of Islam from Hinduism to Zoroastrianism, to Christianity, to Judaism, and others. Many people are nevertheless too obstinate to accept this fact and would deny it, but it is a fact as obvious as the sun and requires no proof – *res ipsa loquitur*. Implicitly understood in this principle of the Universality of the Message is the preservation of the Book from corruption, as described earlier as well as the finality of the Message. Indeed, our master Muhammad is the Messenger of God, the Seal of prophecy, after whom there is no prophet.

The universality of the message also entails the necessity for the Muslim to explain his Islam to people and to manifest its reality. This is not a reference to the kind of activity associated with Christian missionaries: there is an immense difference between calling people to faith through manifesting it, and missionary activity based on stratagems connected with educational programs, healthcare, and so on. A third fundamental principle of Islam that has been misunderstood globally is that of jihad. Jihad, according to Muslims, is a significant and compound term, as well as a comprehensive concept that cannot be reduced to the act of fighting alone, as the instigators of conflict would have it. God Most High has said: "*And strive [carry out jihad] for*

God with the Endeavour which is His right. He hath chosen you and hath not laid upon you in religion any hardship; the faith of your father Abraham (is yours). He hath named you 'Muslims' [those who submit to Him] of old time and in this (Scripture), that the messenger may be a witness against you, and that ye may be witnesses against mankind. (22:78)." And He Most Glorious has said: "As for those who strive in Us, We surely guide them to our paths, and lo! God is with the good." (29:69)

The Messenger of God, Muhammad, has said: "*Thou went forth and well thou did; thou hast gone forth from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad, the jihad of a servant against his passions*" – in another narration "...the jihad of the heart." In other words, jihad is the exertion of effort to attain everything that pleases God whether this be a virtue or a deed, and to prevent everything that incurs His Wrath. The jihad of physical combat is but one form of jihad and does not signify the totality of the meaning of jihad. Even the type of jihad involving physical combat has certain criteria as it has been enjoined in Islam. God Most High has said: "*Fight [qa>tilu>] in the way of God against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! God loveth not aggressors.*" (2:190)

The purpose of jihad therefore is to come to the relief of the oppressed and repel aggression. God Most High has said:

"Permission to fight is given unto those who fight because they have been wronged; and God is Able to give them victory. Those who have been driven from their homes unjustly, for no cause other than for their saying: Our Lord is God." (22:39-40)

Nevertheless, we find fanaticism and intentional disregard towards the reality of this primordial religion of Islam, as well as an insistence on making of it a partner for fighting and a *casus belli*. This has led to a great deal of confusion concerning the proper understanding of jihad. Islam, it is said, was spread by the sword and summons men to war and violence. In order to refute this false notion, it suffices to mention what unbiased Westerners have written. Thomas Carlyle in his book, *On Heroes and Hero Worship*, calls the accusation that our Prophet Muhammad relied upon the sword to convince people to accept his message as sheer stupidity and nonsense; it is contrary to reason that a man would draw his sword to kill people and that these same people would accept his message. If people believed in Muhammad, they obviously did so willingly and freely. Those who believed in him exposed themselves to outside attack before they were even

capable of fighting back. The French historian Gustave Le Bon in his book *La civilisation des Arabes* (1884) wrote, when discussing the secret to Islam's spread in the time of the Prophet and in the time of the conquests after him: Far from being imposed by force, the Qur'an was spread only by persuasion. It is obvious that persuasion alone could bring the peoples who conquered the Arabs later, like the Turks and the Mongols, to adopt it. In India, where the Arabs only passed through, the Qur'an spread so far that it counts today more than fifty million adherents... The spread of the Qur'an in China was not less considerable...though the Arabs never conquered the least piece of the Celestial Empire... And may God to inspire us with what is correct and truly guided.

ARTICLE III

A fourth Islamic principle that has been greatly misunderstood is its position regarding the status of women. There are two groups of issues related to this question. One group consists of those issues whose explanation below should be readily understandable by the West, whereas the other group consists of those issues that continue to represent a challenge to Western thinking. Perhaps we can deal with the latter group as a response to the fourth question from America, which was: to what degree can Muslim scholars living in the West play a part in better explaining the principles of Islam especially with regard to the shari'ah. As for the first group, it includes the unequal distribution of inheritance as an indication of Muslim bias against women, the question of divorce, and the question of polygamy. It is clear that the perception of a bias against women in matters of inheritance is based on the understanding that a certain juristic rule applies generally, whereas it is only related to specific cases.

We are speaking here of the rule that the male has the share of two females, and it derives from His Words – Most High is He: "*God chargeth you concerning (the provision for) your children: to the male the equivalent of the portion of two females*¹ (4:11)." Without wishing to overburden the reader with complex rules of dividing up an inheritance, suffice it to say that this particular rule applies to only four specific cases within the Islamic system of inheritance, which is a comprehensive one. There are other cases in which a woman receives as much as a man, and yet others where a woman receives more than a man.

There are still other cases in which women inherit but men do not. Examining the totality of these cases, which makes a comprehensive system as such as already mentioned, we find that there are more than 10 cases in which a woman's inheritance is equal to a man's. There are more than 14 cases in which a woman inherits more than a man and there are 5 cases in which a woman inherits whereas a man does not. On the other hand, there are only 4 cases in which a man inherits twice the portion of a woman.

This system of inheritance is intertwined with other arrangements such as the obligation of adequately supporting the wife in every respect which is something mandated by Islam on men. It is also intertwined with fact that women are not only financially independent, but there is no obligation upon their wealth in the same way that men are obliged. This should dispel any lingering doubts in the minds of Westerners concerning the supposed bias of Islam in this regard. As for divorce, the West has come to accept divorce in its own society and so no longer protests against Islam on account of it, especially given the permissibility of a woman to divorce a man if he fails to meet a precondition laid down in the marriage contract. Likewise, the case of polygamy should not be a point of contention particularly since Islam neither introduces it nor makes it obligatory but only permissible, and then only under certain conditions, and because it exists in other religions also, particularly Judaism, being mentioned in the Holy Books of the Old Testament - all of which means there is no reason for it to conflict with the Western mindset.

There are other issues related to this group but here is not the proper place for elaborating upon them. The second group of issues includes: the head-cover for women, the intermingling of the sexes, the permissibility of physically disciplining a woman, and so on. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman Ilaysh expressed the view that there could be an interpretation of the law specifically for Muslim minorities, and that Western Muslim scholars could constitute a new school of thought, in parallel with their Eastern counterparts, that would perhaps seem foreign to Eastern scholars. This developed later into what has come to be called the Jurisprudence of Minorities. We have seen some worthy attempts at dealing with it in Fathi Othman's book in the English language, *Understandings of the Qur'an*, and in his writings on the jurisprudence of minorities; also, Taha Jabir al 'Alwani in his numerous scholarly works on

understanding the Noble Qur'an and in his book on the question of apostasy; as well as 'Abd al-Hamid Abu Sulayman in his book on the exegesis of the verses of the Qur'an that mention the physical disciplining of a woman. All of the aforementioned are contemporary authors. This endeavor found a firm basis in the writings of Martin Lings, René Guénon and Frithjof Schuon-- all Western Muslims -- among others of the same school, as well as in the efforts of Muhammad Asad in his two lengthy books *Islam at the Crossroads* and *The Road to Mecca*, and in his attempts to translate the meanings of the Noble Qur'an into English as well as his commentaries upon it.

We should add here the labors of Dr. Jeffrey Lang in his books *Struggling to Surrender: Some Impressions of an American Convert to Islam* and *Even Angels Ask* both of which have been translated into Arabic by Dr. Mundhir al-'Abasi and published by Dar al-Fikr, amascus. In the first book, he brings to the fore a large collection of impressions, discussions, questions, and difficulties on this subject and then proceeds to discuss them the way in which we ought to discuss questions of this nature – that is, by using a scholarly methodology and without rejecting sources, combined with a profound and thorough review of the problem, the consequences and difficulties of each solution, and other possible proposals, all of which should be indicative of the utmost effort of ijтиhad and not simply uninformed objections. We have not seen an effort equal to these examples in terms of degree of reflection and discussion since.

I propose the convening of a conference that gathers the entire spectrum of Western Muslim scholars such as Nuh Keller, 'Abd al-Hakim Winter, Khalid Blankenship, Hamza Yusuf and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, along with those mentioned earlier, and that has an agenda that is broad enough for these kinds of issues, and perhaps others. The purpose of it would be to study these issues and clarify the various perspectives on them without it being necessary to reach a consensus since the reality is such that it demands multiple viewpoints. Thus in the previous three articles, I have outlined four Islamic principles that alarm the international community as a result of their not being properly understood. I have also addressed the question of how scholars in the West can contribute to a better understanding of Islamic law, or shari'ah. Four questions remain, which I will attempt to answer in the next two articles.

ARTICLE IV

The second and third questions were: “*Is there room for greater cooperation between Islamic scholars and experts, on the one hand, and imams and other religious leaders in Muslim societies?*” and “*How can ijtihad, or ongoing reevaluation in accordance with the principles of Islamic juristic reasoning, by religious leaders and academics help shift public opinion toward the real tradition of Islam and toward better relations between East and West?*” The response to the second question is represented by the concept of juridical and research councils or academies, of which the most profound and oldest endeavor is perhaps the Islamic Research Academy of the eminent University of al-Azhar in Cairo. It began its activities in the early sixties of the 20th century.

It gathers together 50 members of which some 30 are Egyptian and 20 are from all over the Muslim world. It also comprises various areas of expertise be it in the medical sciences, astronomy, engineering, and such or in various fields such as law, politics, economics and the like. In addition, there are a group of intellectuals, jurists, and scholars well-versed in the various specialized disciplines of the shari‘ah such as hermeneutics, hadith (sayings and traditions of the Prophet), doctrine, and so forth.

We note that it was named the Research Academy and not the Jurisprudence Academy to make clear that it would cover all the concerns of the Muslim Community including contemporary issues, whether these concerns be in the area of jurisprudence, legislation, politics or human society; whether they be for establishing positions necessary for the Muslims to unite around in the face of change; or for the investigation of various opinions and ideas or to establish the proper framework for the review of these opinions and ideas; and for whatever else the term “research” would apply more than the term “jurisprudence.”

The Academy also brings together a group of highly experienced people who are called upon to help in examining whatever it is the Academy requires pertaining to scholarly questions in narrow areas of specialization so that the members of the Academy may understand the nature of the challenge posed by this specialized area; and also in order that the members grasp the depth of the issue of concern, its relation to other issues, the consequences following from the choice of

a particular opinion or stance vis-à-vis the issue being researched, as well as the degree to which the ultimate aims of the shari'ah are realized in this area. It also brings together researchers in numerous specialties and specialized committees formed of various members branched out to research different questions which need to be studied.

Another endeavor that has proven successful is that of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs under the Ministry of Endowments of Egypt which began its activities in the early sixties of the twentieth century. It forms numerous committees to deal with matters such as basic Islamic instruction, Islamic thought and propagation, and other matters. Every one of these committees comprises a large group of specialists in the diverse fields of not only the shari'ah sciences but many other sciences as well, if not all of them. The Council produces research which it publishes in Arabic, printing in large numbers so it represents a distinctive religious address to religious leaders, preachers, and the public in general. It also issues a monthly journal, translated into English, French, German, and many African and Asian languages, that acts as its mouthpiece and is responsible for communicating the results of its work to those who benefit from it across the globe.

Similarly, another successful endeavour is that of the Islamic Fiqh Academy of the Organization of the Islamic Conference which is based in Jeddah. It was established in the year 1980 and in a quarter of a century has produced much solid work on contemporary questions of jurisprudence. It also includes various specialists from around the Muslim world, having its own group of experts and researchers. The Academy convenes its sessions biennially in a Muslim country and its members choose a number of subjects to study and conduct necessary research on, publishing this in its journal which now spans over forty volumes. It also publishes the discussions that ensue around these studies and this is a unique step in the endeavour to unify juridical opinion across the Muslim world, which is something many people feel strongly about. The Islamic Jurisprudence Council of the World Muslim League in the blessed city of Mecca is another successful effort. It gathers together scholars from the entire Muslim world, aided by specialists in every field as well as researchers dedicated to the collection of scholarly materials. It releases its opinions and fatwas every year in the form of decisions and recommendations concerning issues it has studied. Yet another notable effort has been the International

Union for Muslim Scholars and the European Council for Fatwa and Research, which published the seventh edition of its semi-annual journal in July 2005 (the eighth may have been published but has not yet reached me). This journal has dealt with many important issues and has offered noteworthy opinions and solutions.

All of these efforts indicate that there has been a qualitative shift in Islamic jurisprudence and thought in our present age which underscores the fact that greater room for cooperation between Islamic scholars and experts on the one hand, and imams and other religious leaders in Muslim societies on the other hand, has indeed been realized. There is always the potential that the benefit of this will increase and expand geographically and qualitatively and that there can be even more interaction. The third question asks: *"How can ijtihad, or ongoing re-evaluation in accordance with the principles of Islamic juristic reasoning, by religious leaders and academics help shift public opinion toward the real tradition of Islam and toward better relations between East and West?"* These are achieved in my opinion by:

- Emphasizing the concept of an authoritative religious body and stressing the fact that religion is akin to a science and not a public field of activity. In this sense, it is like the science of medicine. This is because religion has its own sources of knowledge and its own means of investigation. It has its own questions and its own scholarly methodologies. Furthermore, it has its own schools of thought on the implementation of all of this.
- These are characteristics of a science. Religion is not a field of activity such as the arts, sports, or partisan politics, all of which allow for the participation of the public and allows for the expression of opinions, thoughts, or "brainstorming". To treat religion as if it were a field of activity is detrimental to religion itself and creates a barrier both to arriving at that desired exchange of ideas and experiences and to inculcating a scholarly attitude in people that might lead them to be convinced of our words.
- Presenting things in the best possible manner and adapting the language of communication to achieve a widespread culture of understanding around those decisions that have been reached. This can be accomplished only by defining the concepts denoted by a given terminology and then spreading the terminology used for those concepts

via media that is well informed and understands the significance of these issues.

- Continuing in the interaction and exchange that will allow us to achieve our goals. Two questions remain of those presented to me: on the lessons Muslims can learn from the challenges experienced by other religions, and on the role and scope of individual ijтиhad. We shall answer these in the fifth and final article.

ARTICLE V

The fifth of the questions of the Americans is: "*What lessons can Muslims learn from the challenges faced by scholars and experts in other religions such as Judaism, Hinduism and Christianity?*"

and the sixth is: "*What role can individual ijтиhad play in people's lives while maintaining its individual characterization?*"

As a response to the fifth question, we say: there is potential for us to benefit from those religions and there is no objection to doing so. This would require certain things including: studying these challenges and the means of facing them; adopting those solutions which conform to the doctrines of Islam as well as to local and national circumstances; and benefiting from certain other solutions after adapting them. The most important thing, though, is studying these challenges in a wide-ranging, profound and scholarly manner, which is what the University of al-Azhar is engaged in today. I believe our knowledge in this regard is still poor.

Acquainting ourselves with other religions, especially those of non-Middle Eastern origin, remains elusive. There is in fact but a single study in the Arabic language on Buddhism. There is not even an Arabic translation of the Hindu Vedas or of the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics which was printed in English in 1912. This is doubtless urgently needed today following the unprecedented manner in which the world has opened up to become like a single village. There is a certain prevalent attitude that might have been suitable and correct in the past, which is that there is no need for a Muslim to be informed of that mass of religious doctrines that apparently contradicts Islam, but it has now become a present-day obligation not only in order to defend Islam itself but to be able to better act on its message.

And for every moment there is a duty. In response to the sixth and last question, the one that inquires about the efficacy of individual ijтиhad in the survival of Muslims in the world today and in maintaining their interactions with the world in a way that preserves their identity and distinctiveness, we say that this individual ijтиhad would be contingent on the existence of certain factors:

- The freedom of belief that is permitted Muslims who live in the West.
- This was not afforded to them in the past, when religious sectarianism prevented the existence of religious and cultural pluralism. War then occurred in the form of forced emigration and the extermination of peoples for the sake of religious homogeneity; we all know that what happened in Andalusia (Islamic Spain) after it fell to the Catholic kings is an example of this though we do not stop to ponder about it much today.
- The freedom of belief afforded to Muslims in the West today is a reality that escapes the notice of many Muslims and it is necessary to make it clear for them and fix it in their minds because it is one of the peculiarities of secularism which must be acknowledged. While religious people, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, rightly reject the suppositions of secularism, it must be admitted that it has succeeded in establishing a pluralism that has allowed Muslims to spread across the world and enjoy essential freedoms sometimes not afforded them at home.
- Many Muslims refuse to concede this, since their religion, for its part, already acknowledges others and has accepted confessional and intellectual pluralism throughout its history and lands. Their experiment in pluralism arrived at the same results without having to defy religion and confine it to the sphere of personal belief. This, however, belongs to the realm of historical experience whereas the reality we live in is as we mentioned.

2. The second issue is that of lawfulness, by which we mean that Muslims living in a non-Muslim society must abide by its laws in their conduct and behavior and they must not oppose the generally prevailing order or customary manners. They must not willfully violate its laws or deviate from the order. If they have need for distinct treatment

for example because of unique issues related to personal affairs, or concerning life and death, eating and drinking, burial and other things required by their shari'ah but conflicting with the law of the land, then the early jurists formulated a way for an agreement with the governing authority – or what we call a protocol in contemporary times – allowing Muslims to establish their rites and maintain their distinctiveness without opposing laws or the prevalent order. Muslims have exercised this option often, succeeding most of the time, which permits us to be optimistic about its possibility in the future. Abiding by the law while dealing with the facts of life sometimes requires ingenuity in finding new ways or ideas appropriate to the milieu, for as they say, "*between yes and no there are many degrees*".

A good example of this is the experience of Muslims living in present-day India and their system of independent adjudication for cases involving themselves. They are permitted to plead intra-communal cases before an internal court as long as both litigants agree to it. However, if the litigants oppose and contest each other's rights such that one of the parties does not accept to argue before a shari'ah court, preferring to plead its case before a civil court instead, or if one party rejects the ruling of the shari'ah court after it is issued, then the ruling becomes non-binding, and the case can be taken to a civil court. Chief Justice Shaykh Mujahid al-Islam Qasimi – may God have mercy on his soul – informed me in 1994 that there had not been a single instance of one of the litigants rejecting the shari'ah court since 1936, when this system was first put in place. Arrangements similar to this, in which there is a parallel judiciary, draw their effectuality and legal obligation from the larger community and the fact of its falling under the authority and legitimacy of the state.

3. Existence of an authoritative religious body. This is realized only when Muslims possess a scholarly authority that has their confidence, to whom they refer, and whose judgments they adhere to and accept. The responsibility for this falls a priori on Muslims but it must be acknowledged by non-Muslims who need to understand its extreme importance with respect to the issues of the participation of Muslims in society and their assimilation; it is nothing like what some of them believe in imagining that an Islamic authority is something to be feared and will reduce their security and stability. Indeed, our great jurists have left behind for us nearly twenty thousand juridical principles that represent a broad and flexible array of thought capable of fully

comprehending every variable. It possesses a moral dimension which we feel no one in the world would reject, given that it calls for mercy and for kindness amongst neighbors, for cooperation, for transparency, and for many other qualities which we do not feel the humanity of our times would reject. These, then, are the questions we received from the Americans. We hope that students and specialists in our university, as well as those concerned with general intellectual matters, will take note of the effort behind these questions, how they came to be issued only after extensive information-gathering and study that could fill shelves and after the kind of organized thought that draws connections between various facts and which does not busy itself with the illusions, trifles and pettiness that upend the edifice of knowledge. Indeed, answering these questions from America has given me reason to be both glad and concerned – concerned at the responsibility upon our collective shoulders.

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<http://www.sfcg.org/Documents/pihmufti.pdf>

The partners of peace

Source: Times of India

The terror attacks that shook America over 10 years ago left a scar on the face of world diplomacy and an obstacle hampering attempts to bring peace to our ailing planet through a much needed inter-religious dialogue.

9/11, the day on which 3,000 civilians were killed, marked the beginning of a struggle by Muslims to integrate into the world, particularly the West. The brutal attack, carried out by a few misled minds claiming to be fighting in the name of God, tarnished a great deal of the image of Islam. And as Muslims fight to crystallise the differences between radicalism and the noble teachings of Islam, western and eastern officials and commentators are baffled, wondering, “*Where are the moderates?*”

With only extremism highlighted, thanks to acts perpetuated by a few radicals, many are eager to see moderate representatives of the noble religion of Islam stand out in the Muslim world, and rise as partners for peace. Reconciling Islam with the modern world has been particularly imperative for Muslims in a set of continuous attempts dating back to the 19th century, when what became known as the Islamic reform movement sprouted within Al Azhar University in Cairo, the chief institution for Islamic learning in the world.

At Dar al Ifta, Egypt’s supreme body for Islamic legal edicts over which I preside, we’re in a continuous struggle to apply Islam to modern life. That’s not because Islam doesn’t fit in our modern times, for Islam is universal; the challenge lies in trying to find solutions to modern problems from within the Islamic doctrine, and consequently deriving new rulings from Islamic law pertaining to their application. We issue thousands of fatwas or authoritative legal edicts - for example, ensuring the right of women to dignity, education and employment, and to hold political office, and condemning violence against them. We have upheld the right of freedom of conscience, and of freedom of expression within the bounds of common decency. We have promoted the common ground that exists between Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and other eastern religions. We unequivocally condemned violence against civilians during Egypt’s own struggle against terrorism in the 1980s and the 1990s, and following the

heinous crime of 9/11 and, most recently, the horrific church bombing that shook Alexandria a few days ago. We continue to do so in public debates with those who uphold extremist views of Islam; in training students from all over the world at Egypt's theological institutions; and also in our counseling of captured terrorists. As the head of one of the leading Islamic authorities in the world, let me restate: The murder of civilians is a crime against humanity and God, punishable in this life and the hereafter. While we must strive to reinforce the common principles that we share, we must also accept differences in our values and in our outlook. Islam and Indian civilizations have distinct value systems. Respect for our differences is a foundation for coexistence, and never for conflict. Since his historic election more than two years ago, President Barack Obama has made it a point to reach out to the Muslim world. These overtures have been heard and welcomed by many including our Indian partners. But practical steps are needed to turn good intentions into a sustained relationship of mutual trust and respect.

Firstly, for Islam to be an active and moderate player in today's world, certified Muslim clerics must be recognized as the ones who speak for Islam. Too often, the media succumbs to the temptation to treat as Muslims those extremists who are representatives of nobody but themselves. We share the blame. The time has come for Muslim clerics to be more vocal and professional in their approach. Already, massive headway is being made throughout the Muslim world in educating preachers and students of Islam, helping them engage more productively with the modern world. Meanwhile, Muslim clerics are reaching out internationally to take hold of inter-religious dialogue and improve interfaith relations, such as the Common Word and the C1 World Dialogue initiative.

Secondly, it is necessary for our dialogue to be multifaceted. Beyond the immediate call to improve relations, there is a dire need to make our dialogue comprehensive, including scientific, cultural, economic and technological discourses. There should be stronger ties between Indian and Egyptian universities, research facilities and students.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=105

http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-01-15/edit-page/28377903_1_islamic-al-azhar-university-muslim-world

Disappointment – and hope – after Cairo by Sheikh Ali Gomaa

Source: common ground news

Last month marked the first anniversary of President Barack Obama's speech to the Muslim world in Cairo where he sought "*a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world; one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect*"

However, the hope that greeted President Obama's speech has turned into disappointment as people realized that turning promises into reality is not easy to achieve. While he should be congratulated on his efforts to change the discourse of US policy towards the Muslim world, it is clear that people expect more than simply statements from him. It is vital to rekindle the new spirit that accompanied President Obama's speech and to discuss together how we can transform it into practical programs that bridge the concept of dialogue with real and affective partnership between East and West. I believe there are several ways that can help forge a constructive partnership between the Muslim world and the US. The Islam we were taught in our youth is one that calls for peace and mercy. The Prophet Muhammad told us: "*Those who show mercy are shown mercy by the All-Merciful. Show mercy to those who are on earth and the One in the heavens will show mercy to you.*" Furthermore, the Qur'an teaches us: "*O people we have created you from a single male and female and divided you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another.*" When God says "*to know one another*" He did not mean in order to kill one another. All religions have forbidden the killing of innocents. Rather we have been ordered to cooperate in a constructive manner.

For over a thousand years ordinary Muslims have worshiped God, engaged in developing their society and the human civilization, and have sought to cultivate good moral character. They have engaged, absorbed and assimilated a multiplicity of civilizations such as the Persians, Indians, Chinese, and Greeks, into our cultural and intellectual life. We benefited from all of them as well as contributing to them. Such a humanitarian and cosmopolitan worldview does not allow us to consider ourselves as superior to other people. And since our civilization is concerned with humanity, it brings together both the spiritual and the material. We do not hate life nor do we seek to create social imbalance, and anyone who engages in this has gone against the

teachings of our religion and what we have been taught as being worthy of good moral character. The need for dialogue between people of different faiths and cultures is far greater today in view of the problems faced in the relations between peoples and communities. Dialogue stems from the recognition of identities and specificities, avoiding at the same time that their assertion turn into hostility towards others leading to bloody borders among religions and cultures. Dialogue is based upon the respect for religious plurality and cultural diversity. Dialogue is not about trying to defeat others, but about understanding and learning about them. The Qur'an insists that the world's beauty lies in its racial and religious pluralism, otherwise God would not have created it so (see Qur'an, 10:99 and 5:48).

Our world is changing at a rapid pace. Staggering developments in travel, migration, trade and technology have brought communities closer, yet we have become alienated in many other aspects. Many find such ever growing closeness and communication enriching, but for others it can be a source of confusion and intimidation. Constructive dialogue, in such situations, can help defuse tension and keep problems from escalating. We must do all that we can to promote reconciliation in the aftermath of any conflict. Constructive dialogue is indeed a powerful tool in conflict prevention, management and resolution. But we still need to work harder on many fronts.

There is, for example, an urgent need to promote the value of cultural diversity through education. We must strengthen educational systems with a wider vision so that young people could benefit from cultural diversity and accept the 'other.' For solutions, we must create a wide network engaging the collaboration of local governments, civil society, the media, young leaders and other professionals. We must also endeavor to clear misconceptions and misinterpretations, which often mar our attitudes towards the other. These include the position of women in Muslim societies, the role of the Shariah, the right of minorities, and so on. These must be discussed honestly and effort must be made to understand the broader historical, theological and cultural premises and dynamics. In the case of the position of Muslim women, many in the West only understand it in terms of 'women's issues,' a categorization that is uncharacteristic in the Muslim milieu, where both women and men are seen as intrinsically linked, as individuals, to family and society. The status of women in Islam is not just confined to her being the first believer (Khadijah, the Prophet's wife),

or the first martyr (Sumayyah), or the first emigrant (Ruqayyah who emigrated with her husband 'Uthman). Rather, history attests to Muslim women who took the positions of rulership, judgeship, teaching, participating in armed conflicts, issuing fatwas, regulating economic and public affairs, and expressing opinions on key matters in community issues. As a case in point, in the fatwas issued by Dar al-Ifta al-Misriyyah, for example, we emphasize a woman's right to dignity, education, work and assuming positions in the political arena and have condemned all forms of violence committed against a woman.

We also need to open permanent and effective channels of scientific, technological, economic, cultural and scientific dialogue and cooperation between the Muslim world and the US. President Obama mentioned in his speech that throughout their history, Muslim communities have proved that they have contributed immensely in the fields of education and innovation. He even made the point that it is not possible for development strategies to depend solely on wealth-- innovation and education are more important for long term progress.

This can only be achieved in an environment that respects international legitimacy, religious distinctiveness and the cultural traditions of people. Any reform must stem from societal reality, cultural and religious specificities, convictions, and their epistemological outlooks. Reform simply cannot be imposed. Furthermore, there is a critical need for global Muslim representative bodies such as the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), which together with Fiqh Assembly in Jeddah and the scholarly assistance of institutions such as al-Azhar and the Islamic Research Assembly, can become key focal points for the development of moderate and peaceful Muslim discourses.

However, it is necessary that balanced foreign policy be the basis for improved relations. For the Muslim world, and particularly its clerical community, it is important that the rule of law prevail in times of conflict. There should be a concerted effort on both sides to respect international law and UN resolutions. By holding high the rule of law, justice can prevail and no one can hide behind false excuses. Most immediately amongst Muslim world opinion, this needs to be applied to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict removing long-standing suffering from the Palestinian people. We all are aware that making a durable and just peace in Palestine would have a sustainable influence over relations between cultures and religions. Moreover, a just peace is

a necessity for the success of any initiative that seeks to achieving a genuine rapprochement between the US and the Arab and Muslim World. The responsibility of an improved relationship between the Muslim world and US falls on both sides. I feel that this is not only possible, but it is in fact the only way we can build a brighter and more prosperous world for our children. With cooperation and respect, I believe that no task is impossible.

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<http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=28202&lan=en&sid=1&sp=0&isNew=1&partner=rss&emc=rss>

Islam, Israel and the United States

Source: The Wall Street Journal

America and the West have been victims of violent extremists acting in the name of Islam, the tragic events of 9/11 being only the most egregious of their attacks.

Western officials and commentators are consumed by the question, “*Where are the moderates?*”

Many, seeing only the extremism perpetuated by a radical few, despair of finding progressive and peaceful partners of standing in the Muslim world.

However, reconciling Islam with modernity has been an imperative for Muslims before it became a preoccupation for the West. In particular, the process dates back to the 19th century, when what became known as the Islamic reform movement was born in Al Azhar University in Cairo, Islam’s premiere institution of learning.

At the Dar al Iftaa, Egypt’s supreme body for Islamic legal edicts over which I preside, we wrestle constantly with the issue of applying Islam to the modern world. We issue thousands of fatwas or authoritative legal edicts—for example affirming the right of women to dignity, education and employment, and to hold political office, and condemning violence against them. We have upheld the right of freedom of conscience, and of freedom of expression within the bounds of common decency. We have promoted the common ground that exists between Islam, Christianity and Judaism. We have underscored that governance must be based on justice and popular sovereignty. We are committed to human liberty within the bounds of Islamic law. Nonetheless, we must make more tangible progress on these and other issues. We unequivocally condemned violence against the innocent during Egypt’s own struggle with terrorism in the 1980s and 90’s, and after the heinous sin of 9/11. We continue to do so in public debates with extremists on their views of Islam, in our outreach to schools and youth organizations, in our training of students from all across the world at Egypt’s theological institutions, and in our counseling of captured terrorists. As the head of the one of the foremost Islamic authorities in the world, let me restate: The murder of civilians is a crime against humanity and God punishable in this life and the next.

Yet, just as we recommit to reinforcing the values of moderation in our faith, we look to the United States to assume its responsibility for the sake of a better relationship between the West and Islam.

First, it is essential that the U.S. confront the fear and misunderstanding that has often pervaded the public discourse about Islam, especially in the media.

Second, while we must strive to reinforce the common principles that we share, we must also accept the reality of differences in our values and in our outlook. Islam and the West have distinct value systems. Respect for our differences is a foundation for coexistence, and never for conflict.

Finally, there must a true commitment to the rule of law, and to sovereign equality, as the legitimate basis for international relations. While some of the divide between Islam and the West lies in the realm of ideas, it lies mostly in the realm of politics. The violence and the aggression to which many Muslim countries have been subjected are the main sources of a deep and legitimate sense of grievance, and they must be addressed. Israel's occupation of Palestine must be brought to an end; its continuation is an affront to the fundamental tenets of justice and freedom that we all seek to uphold. In Iraq and Afghanistan, full sovereignty and independence must be restored to their people with the withdrawal of all foreign forces. President Barack Obama's historic address to the Muslim world from Cairo on June 4 was a landmark event that opened the door to a new relationship between Islam and the West, precisely because it acknowledged these imperatives. Yet much work needs to be done by both sides. This week in Washington I am participating in the Common Word Initiative, a group of religious leaders hosted by Georgetown University's Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding. While the focus of this initiative has been to foster dialogue between Islam and Christianity, I will call for its expansion to include representatives of all the Abrahamic faiths. The road ahead will be difficult, but we can, God willing, arrive at a more peaceful future together.

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<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB20001424052748703298004574457452301729982.html>

Welcome, Mr President By Sheikh Ali Gomaa, Grand Mufti of Egypt

Source: Ahram Weekly

We welcome President Barack Obama's visit to Egypt and his long anticipated address to the Islamic world. We hope this visit brings further improvement in mutual relations, which I believe can only be accomplished through better policies. In my opinion, policies can only be improved by adopting a collection of actions and attitudes that intellectuals and religious scholars in the Islamic world hope will govern mutual relations. I have summed up such actions and attitudes in the following points:

- We want to open permanent channels for sustained scientific, cultural, economic and technological dialogue between the US and us. Such channels can only function properly in an environment characterised by respect for international legitimacy and UN resolutions. I refer specifically to those pertaining to the Muslim people's central concern: Palestine and the aggression against the Palestinian people, as exemplified by the occupation, barriers and settlements, and by such flagrant acts of belligerency as mass detentions and killing, and the consequent deprivation of this people's fundamental rights to water, freedom of movement, work, education and life. We believe that the US has the power to intervene positively in order to help right prevail over the extremist voices that urge perpetual conflict and that seek to fortify the concepts of foreign occupation, oppression and the abuse of human rights.

- It is important to stress that Islam is capable of existing in all ages and building bridges with all civilizations, a fact that has been substantiated by history and confirmed by Islamic sources of authority at all levels. This obliges dialogue with voices of Islamic moderation, which should be used as a frame of reference for the advancement of mutual understanding between the Islamic and Western worlds, so as to usher in a brighter future and pave the way for equitable cooperation in which both the Islamic world and the US can attain their interests in a continually just manner in which no party transforms itself into an executive instrument for actions that ultimately conflict with their own interests. It follows that the application of this principle will put an end to disciplinary campaigns that excite bitterness and rancor and that only complicate matters further in the long run.

Occupation can never be consistent with the defense of rights or with the type of true and equitable partnership that should prevail between the Islamic world and the US in order to eliminate poverty, disease and ignorance, and to safeguard the future of humanity.

- The foregoing principles are grounded in many Quranic verses, among which is the following: *"Say: Oh People of the Book! Come to the terms in common between us and you: that we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partner with him; that we shall not erect, from among ourselves, lords and masters other than Allah. If then they turn away, say ye: Bear witness that we (at least) are they who have bowed to Allah's will."* (Surat Al-Imran: 64)

- For the sake of the pursuit of peace in the region and in the world, there must be an end to the campaigns of defamation against Islam and the Muslim people, the aim of which was to fabricate and disseminate a false image of Islam and Muslims as the enemies of Western civilization. These campaigns of defamation were spearheaded by certain research centers that still spout antiquated Orientalist clichés and fail to heed a very important truth, which is that reform policies must be indigenous not exogenous. For any reform process to sustain itself and prove truly effective on the ground, it must emanate from the realities of a given society and its culture, and emerge with frameworks of the convictions of its people; their perceptions of the universe, mankind and life; their inherited beliefs; and their religions. Those research centers should bear in mind that the principle of diversity, which all modern democracies uphold, must be applied in practice. It follows that they should respect Islamic traditions and refrain from suggesting direct intervention in all that pertains to the properties of this religion.

We pray to God, may He be exalted, that this visit will mark an auspicious beginning of a new era of relations, characterized by a fresh understanding of realities, sincerity in the intention to realize a more stable and cooperative future, and a partnership in the building of human civilization.

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<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2009/950/sc3.htm>

Do we need “A Common Word”?

Source: Common Ground News

Cambridge, England - Sheikh Ali Gomaa, Grand Mufti of Egypt, spoke at Churchill College, Cambridge University on 12 October 2008. The gathering was organised by the Radical Middle Way, a Muslim grassroots initiative articulating a mainstream understanding of Islam, in partnership with the Cambridge University Islamic Society. This is an excerpt. I greet you all with the greeting of Islam: peace be with you all. I would like to present you with some statistics from the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad). The Qur'an has roughly 6000 verses. Three hundred of those verses address matters of law—roughly 5 percent. We have about 60,000 Hadiths (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad).

Out of those, 2000 speak to matters of law – about 3%. So what do the rest of the Qur'an and the Hadiths speak to? They speak to matters of etiquette. And these matters of etiquette and manners, in the realm of the shari'a (Islamic principles), are connected with theology. This means that 97 percent of our religion is composed of etiquette and manners which are related to matters of faith. At the pinnacle of our faith and theology is the concept of the oneness of God. And at the top of the list of values are the values of compassion and mercy. We say before reciting or reading any part of the Qur'an, "*In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.*"

So the concept of mercy is repeated twice. God has many different attributes – there are attributes of greatness and there are those of beauty. It is very possible for God to begin the chapters of the Qur'an with an attribute of this and an attribute of that: for example, "*In the name of God, the Avenger, the Compassionate.*" But God says instead, "*In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.*" This means that man's relationship with God is between Mercy and Mercy. A Hadith attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) says, "*The merciful ones receive mercy from the Merciful, exalted be He.* Show mercy on earth and you will receive Mercy from the One in Heaven." *In this Hadith, the Prophet is telling us to show mercy toward one another.* So mercy is the basis for etiquette and manners in Islam, and what is borne out of this concept is the attribute of love. When we speak with others, we speak about the manners and etiquette that are linked with our faith because this is the foundation upon which our religion is built

and this is the common ground between others and us. Speak to them about this 95 percent or 97 percent of our religion. This is what drove us clerics, scholars and intellectuals to write the document, “A Common Word”, which declares the common ground between Christianity and Islam. It is based on love of God and love of one’s neighbour. We have to remember that this is the basis of our religion.

That is why this is a good method of correcting some of the misconceptions people have about Islam. And it clarifies, to ourselves as well as to the world, who we are. The word wasatiyya, or middle way, in the Qur'an has a very gentle and subtle meaning. God says, “*We have appointed you a nation of the middle way so you can be witnesses unto mankind, and so the Prophet [peace be upon him] can be a witness unto you*” (Qur'an 2:143).

Some of the scholars say that this word, wasat, or middle, is the pinnacle of the mountain. As you ascend the mountain and then descend, the pinnacle is in the middle. And while we are at the top of mountain, we can see everyone and everyone can see us. Another word used in this verse is “witness”, which in Arabic means the one who is seen, and is not restricted to the one who is seeing. It is a strange word that brings both these concepts together. It indicates interaction between you and others. This idea of witnessing, of being a witness, has a very deep civilisational meaning. We have to understand that we are a people of an open religion; we have no secrets. Our relationship with others is based on this good example. This is what is meant by love of God and love of one’s neighbour.

“A Common Word” is a long-term strategy for Muslims living in the 21st century. It does not create a veil between the Creator and creation. We do not dispute or argue with God that he has created differences amongst people – we do what He and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) command us to do. The Prophet is the one who said, “*Narrate from me even if it may be [just] one verse.*” The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, “*The Archangel Gabriel kept reminding me of my neighbour to the extent that I thought he would inherit from me.*” He has given us a programme of change, on how we can change our lives for the better. He said begin with yourself and then with those close to you. He said, “*Will you see the small error in the person in front of you and forget the huge error in yourself?*”

So we should return to the Prophet's example and begin with ourselves in this change, and open our arms to others the way our religion calls for. An open heart was the basis for constructing this document and this initiative: "A Common Word".

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<http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=24254&lan=en&sp=0>

We're on board the Same Boat

Source: Voltaire.net

The Muslim world expects that the new Pope will continue his predecessor's tolerance and the line he had opened up to the Islam. One can speak of renovation of religious practices as being very important in the world in which we live.

Studies have shown that what is being taught in Germany concerning Islam is distorted. During suicide attacks, the media immediately speaks of Muslim terrorists, though religion is not mentioned when the terrorist is not Muslim. The truth is that terrorists are our common enemies - they struck us before you, remember the death of Anouar El Sadate. We are in the same boat. The West should cease its generalizations. You cannot spurn 1.3 billion people for the crimes of a few. There exist numerous Islamic laws that prohibit suicidal attacks.

There is no concrete declaration on the part of Mohammed Al Tantawi (the sheik of the Al-Azhar University) regarding Palestine, since the religious Muslims consider the conflict to be political and not religious. Democracy has existed in Egypt for 150 years and we are leading ourselves toward the democratization of the world, but we have internal problems that force us to impose other priorities. For example, we have a 36% rate of illiteracy, high unemployment and are experiencing rapid demographic growth. Those are obstacles in the path to democracy. I agree with Al Tantawi when he says that the French government is entitled to prohibit the use of the veil. In the first place, he said that to use the veil is a religious duty and that no politician should be entitled to prevent it. Then he recognized that each country is sovereign and decides for itself. Muslims are in an pressing situation due to that law which authorizes women to remove their veil.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=86

<http://www.voltairenet.org/We-re-on-board-the-Same-Boat>

Building Bridges of Understanding

Source: Cambridge Inter-faith Program

I am here today in order to try to clear up some of the confusion that exists as to the reality of Islam, the current situation of Muslims in the world, and what the vast majority of Muslims hold to be true. I am here with you today to tackle the issue of terrorism and extremism in order to build bridges understanding between the Muslim world and the West because in this time we live in a global society. The Islam that we were taught in our youth is a religion that calls for peace and mercy.

There have been, however, those who have taken up arms, killed innocent people, committed atrocities, threatened the public safety, damaged international relations and have thrown Muslim societies into turmoil. Many innocent people have lost their lives for no good reason. The rise of violent extremism in the Muslim world has caused confusion around the world, in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies, causing many to identify Islam with violence. Some commentators from the non-Muslim world have taken the actions of a small but highly visible and disruptive minority of people within the Muslim world to represent the beliefs of the majority of Muslims, claiming that Islam has been a violent religion from the beginning. This view has unfortunately been reinforced through the presentation of Islam in much of the mass media. This view of Islam as a religion of violence, retribution, and war is in complete opposition to the truth of our religion and, on behalf of the vast majority of the 1.3 billion Muslims throughout the world, who are ordinary, peace-loving, decent people, I am here to repudiate the actions of a misguided criminal minority and to refute the allegations leveled against our religion by those who have no true understanding of Islam.

The truth of the matter is that Islam has nothing whatsoever to do with the extremism that has come to be associated with it, to the extent that you can safely say to any terrorist, "*you are not from amongst the Muslims.*" Terrorists are criminals, not Muslim activists. Their actions are against the basic teachings of Islam: firstly, they contradict the central theme of peace in Islam. Islam, in Arabic, means peace, peace is the greeting of Muslims amongst themselves, the last word spoken by a Muslim in his prayers, one of God's names, and one of the names for Paradise. Secondly, the Qur'an has permitted freedom of belief for all

of mankind saying, “*To you is your religion and to me is mine.*” Thirdly, the use of violence is prohibited in spreading the faith. The Qur'an explicitly states: “*There is no compulsion in religion,*” and “*Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good counsel and discuss with them in the most kindly manner,*” and “*God does not prevent you from being kind to those who have not fought you on account of your religion or expelled you from your homes nor from dealing justly with them, indeed God loves the just.*” Fourthly – and this is very important – none of these extremists have been educated in Islam in genuine centers of Islamic learning. They are, rather, products of troubled environments and have subscribed to distorted and misguided interpretations of Islam that have no basis in traditional Islamic doctrine. Their aim is purely political and has no religious foundation. It is to create havoc and chaos in the world. We must stand together as one against these people and not allow them to divide us.

My fear is that these extremists will convince the world that the entire Muslim world is the enemy; that a war on terror is a war on the entire Muslim world and anyone who supports the Muslim world against the prevailing view. I have, through my present position, set out to publish an authoritative picture of Islam which, I hope will give the world a better understanding of and empathy for Islam and the Muslim world and help us all to live together in peace, tranquility, and mutual cooperation. What we have learned about Islam has been taken from the clear, sober and scholarly understanding of the Qur'an, “*O people we have created you from a single male and female and divided you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another.*” When God said “*to know one another*” He did not mean in order to kill one another. All religions have forbidden the killing of innocents. Rather we have been ordered to cooperate in a constructive manner “*And if God did not repel some men by others, then the earth would have been corrupted.*”

Who should we trust? Should we trust the extremists or that upon which the entirety of Islamic civilization has been built over 1,400 years? The first Prophetic saying that is taught to a student of Islam is “*Those who show mercy are shown mercy by the All-Merciful. Show mercy to those on earth and the One in the heavens will show mercy to you.*” There is also the advice that Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin of the Prophet, and one of Islam's most saintly and revered teachers, gave to the governor he was appointing in Egypt to be good to his people saying, “*Do not behave like a wild beast plundering the food [of the people you govern].*

Indeed, there are [only] two categories of people: either your brother in religion, or an equal human being. Accidental laxity may come from them, they will make mistakes, and their hands may commit [crimes] intentionally and by mistake. Pardon and forgive them, just as you hope God will pardon and forgive you."

Who should we trust? Should we trust the extremists or the freedom of choice and belief that Islam has enjoined upon us? The Qur'an says, "*Truth comes from God, whoever believes let them believe and whoever does not, let them not believe,*" even when debating with others the Qur'an says, "*Indeed we or you are surely guided or in manifest error.*" One of the problems faced by religious communities today is the issue of authority. In both Islam and other religions we are witnessing a phenomenon in which laypeople without a sound foundation in religious learning have attempted to set themselves up as religious authorities, even though they lack the scholarly qualifications for making valid interpretations of religious law and morality. It is this eccentric and rebellious attitude towards religion that opens the way for extremist interpretations of Islam that have no basis in reality. These interpretations have been made in reaction to political crises, injustices, poverty, and frustration but have no foundation in the truth. Our role as religious leaders who have spent our lives carefully studying religious exegesis is to re-establish authority with those who are in true possession of knowledge.

The source of and justification for much of the extremism and political violence across the Muslim world and beyond is the tragedy of Palestine, which has not been resolved for the last 60 years. We need to understand this complicated situation in order to end the daily bloodshed on both sides. Egypt was quick to answer the call to peace nearly 30 years ago, but to this day we have not arrived at true peace as a result of the intransigence of all parties. Let me be clear by reiterating that Islam is utterly against extremism and terrorism but unless we understand the factors that have led to terrorism and extremism we will never be able to eradicate this scourge. This must be understood in order to build a better future that can bring an end to this grave situation that is destroying the world. For over a thousand years ordinary Muslims have worshipped God, engaged in developing their society, and have sought to cultivate good moral character. This is made clear in the Qur'an which says, "*I have not created man and Jinn except to worship Me.*" "*He caused you to dwell on earth and to develop it.*"

"He is successful who has purified [the heart and soul]." There are more than 6,000 verses in the Qur'an, only 300 of which are related to legal matters; the rest deal with developing good moral character. Likewise there are over 60,000 Prophetic traditions and sayings of which only 2,000 are related to legal matters; the rest deal with developing good moral character. For Muslims the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, is described as being a mercy sent from God to mankind.

From my long study of Islam and its history, I can attest that the history of Islam is free of ethnic cleansing, religious inquisitions, and forced conversions. This may seem contrary to the popular contemporary view of Islam but it is an opinion that has been confirmed by a study carried out by Richard W. Bulliet who demonstrated that while the body politic of Islam spread quickly, it took hundreds of years for populations to convert to Islam. Therefore, in reality the faith of Islam was spread by love, intermarriage, and family relations, not by the sword. We all need to learn from history and build a world for our children and grandchildren and call people to work for the betterment of their societies in a manner in which all are given their due respect and recognize their duties to one another. This is what we have understood from personal freedom. Can we achieve this? The hope that we can, serves as my inspiration, and I pray that you join me in this so that we can realize these goals.

Many people have raised the issue that there are certain verses in the Qur'an that allow Muslims to protect themselves when they are attacked. This is something that can be found in every religious law and civil code, and more recently we find it being sanctioned by the Geneva Convention. The Qur'an says: *"Fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but avoid aggression for God does not like the aggressor."* *"But if they cease then God is Forgiving, Merciful."* This statement has been repeated many times throughout the second chapter of the Qur'an and forms the basis for the Islamic law of warfare, which is only for the purpose of repelling an attack and protecting one's self, one's home and family. There is another issue concerning how people understand jihad, which is, unfortunately, now one of the most familiar Islamic terms in the west. The Arabic word Jihad in Islam refers to the struggle against one's lower self. The meaning is fundamentally spiritual, referring to the purification of the heart, which was described by the Prophet Mohamed as The Greater Jihad, the highest and most

noble meaning of the term. The permission for Muslims to struggle against and to ward off aggression has been described as the Lesser Jihad. This greater jihad gives Muslims the ability to struggle with and to ward off aggression. The Prophet said "*The best form of jihad is a true word in the face of a tyrant.*" Jihad is also used in Islamic discourse to describe the hajj of women to Mecca as it is a hardship for them. However, extremists have misused the word jihad and, unfortunately the mass media, being ignorant of Arabic and the subtlety of the term has now reduced the word to meaning terrorist violence and this has worked to the advantage of the extremists. The widespread and unchallenged interpretation of any kind of violence against non-Muslims as jihad has confused ordinary Muslims around the world.

We see ourselves as a people who have absorbed a multiplicity of civilizations; we have been exposed to and assimilated the great civilizations of the Persians, Indians, Chinese, and Greeks into our cultural and intellectual life, and we benefited from all of them as well as contributing to them. Islamic civilization places people above buildings and worshippers above places of worship. This humanitarian and cosmopolitan worldview does not allow us to consider ourselves as superior to other people. We are proud of our civilization, but we do not reject other civilizations, rather all who work towards the constructive development in the world should be considered as our partners. Since our civilization is concerned with humanity it brings together both the spiritual and the material. We do not hate life nor do we seek to create social imbalance, and anyone who engages in this has gone against the teachings of our religion and what we have been taught of good moral character.

I visited London two years ago and encouraged the British government to facilitate Muslim participation in the mainstream and support existing and ongoing efforts in the Muslim community to that end. Islam needs to be presented in a deeper and more complete way and to be presented with more sensitivity and objectivity in both the media and the educational curriculum in order to reflect Britain's true multicultural character. The issue of British Muslim disenfranchisement needs to be seriously addressed, as well as the establishment of a British based authority for Muslims in Britain to turn to along the lines of Al-Azhar.

There is no more powerful a weapon against extremism than correct education and the recognition on all sides that British Muslims and Non-Muslims belong to this country just as Muslims and Non-Muslims belong to the world. I believe that these recommendations were approved of at the time I made them, however I find it necessary to repeat them again today in the hopes that you will assist me in making them a reality.

Thank you for your kind attention.

<http://themathesontrust.org/papers/islam/Building%20Bridges%20of%20Understanding%20Cambridge%20Interfaith.pdf>

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=78

Anglican bishop pays tribute to Muslim scholar

Source: United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (USPG)

The Bishop of Egypt has paid tribute to a leading Muslim scholar who is helping to promote peace and tolerance among faith communities. At Liverpool Hope University, recently, Bishop Mouneer Anis – guest speaker at last June's USPG Annual Conference – presented His Eminence Sheikh Dr Ali Gomaa for an Honorary Doctorate in Humane Letters. In the citation, Bishop Mouneer said: 'Dr Gomaa is a firm believer in dialogue between faith communities and his views represent the authentic moderate Islamic teaching with its call for peace and tolerance. 'In recent years he became especially concerned about the problem of extremism. In order to combat this extremism he founded one of the great foundations in Egypt actively involved in development, namely Misr el Khair.

'Misr el Khair serves all Egyptians, Muslims and Christians in the area of education and the enabling of small enterprises, and provides primary health care.

Misr el Khair, in partnership with the Anglican Hospital in Egypt, recently initiated a campaign to combat reversible blindness in the Delta of Egypt.'

Anglican Church can play a bridging role

Bishop Mouneer is himself supporting inter faith work through the Anglican Diocese of Egypt. He recently told USPG: 'The Anglican Church can play a bridging role with the other faiths. It seems that, though we are tiny, we are very active in inter faith in this region.'

Canon Huw Thomas, a former USPG Mission Companion in Egypt, commented: 'To witness the courage of these two leaders of different faith communities in Egypt standing together, first in Liverpool's Catholic Cathedral where the award was presented, and later in the Al-Rahma Mosque, where Bishop Mouneer addressed a large gathering, gave us a renewed sense of hope in the possibility of healing some of the distorted views often held of our two faith traditions.'

The Revd Canon Edgar Ruddock, USPG Director, added: 'USPG salutes both Bishop Mouneer and Dr Gomaa for their joint work in the cause of reconciliation, peace and mutual understanding. The world needs leaders able and willing to move out of their comfort zones and work with others to build a better world.'

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=34

http://www.uspg.org.uk/article.php?article_id=1040

A Common Word Conference

Source: Ali-gomaa.com

To begin with, allow me to express my gratitude and appreciation to Dr. Rowan Williams for his kind invitation to attend this historic meeting, which coincides with the launching of the Common Word initiative last year. We have read your response to the Common Word, an initiative that I consider to be an historic event and a promising step toward understanding, love, and peace, and your response is proof of the sincere commitment on your part to peace, love, and the welfare of humankind.

Your message includes several opportunities for a fruitful partnership and contributes to the start of a new era where religious tolerance prevails. For, despite the differences of belief between us, the great similarity that brings us together is love of God and love of neighbor, which is the basis of the Common Word initiative. It is clear from your response that you are fully prepared to enter into dialogue on a profound level. For our part we would like to tell you that we share your willingness for dialogue and that we take this great deal of common ground to be a foundation for promoting respect and understanding that will in turn lead to a deepening of our relationship. We hope this conference will result in new, practical, and groundbreaking recommendations. We have come from diverse backgrounds and traditions, but there is a shared value that has brought us together: the honest commitment to deepening the dialogue between us, and advancing the understanding and cooperation between our two great faiths – Christianity and Islam.

Effective communication is our powerful tool for containing and managing crises. By understanding our respective viewpoints, we can locate the common ground from which to move toward a commitment to the goal of living peacefully in our international community. If we consult the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad in seeking a basis for engaging in dialogue, we will find that, even concerning the origins of creation, things were based on dialogue in accordance with the will of God. We find that when their Lord commanded the angels, who were created with a disposition for obedience, they engaged in a dialogue with God. Dialogue represents a kind of exploration and a request for clarification. This is an important principle of dialogue. When I sit with somebody else I want to

discover them, I want to seek out that which is common between us, I want to correct some of the conceptions I have in my mind about them resulting either from history with its accumulation of events, from reading books by others who have criticized and refuted them, or from some other source. I want to know the truth. When I listen, much of the ice melts away. When we agree on language and terminology, much of our disagreement melts away. This is true to the extent that the famous Muslim scholar Ibn Hazm said that if we are precise with our terminology and agree upon it, three-quarters of the differences between the Earth's inhabitants will end and we will discover that there are much wider areas of agreement and similarity between myself and another than areas of disagreement.

If we consider the dialogue between the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and his relatives in Mecca, in al-Taif, during the Treaty of al-Hudaibiya, between him and the Jews of Medina, between the delegations that came to him, or between him and the kings to whom he sent messengers and letters, if we examine these negotiations and dialogues we will discover that we possess a great treasure that outlines the principles of dialogue between ourselves and others. This in a world where we live in a continuous proximity, where barriers have been lifted through communications, transportation, and modern technology, where everyone has become integrated with everyone else, where ideas have flooded in from everywhere and we have come to live in a world referred to as a small or global village. Every action now in any place will affect others either positively or negatively. As we are witness to the current economic crises, we can see that it is not something isolated to North America or Europe. Rather, it is a global crisis that touches everyone, everywhere. The Common Word gives us a platform from which we can come together to stop and reverse such terrible events for the benefit of mankind. Isolation and seclusion are no longer an option. The only choice is to live together on this Earth. So what should we do? We must engage in dialogue and lay down foundations for it as God intended.

When we began engaging in dialogue more than a quarter of a century ago, we found different misconceptions in people's minds. There were those who thought that dialogue meant a religious debate that was about preaching one's faith until the other person entered into their religion. According to these people the purpose of dialogue is to come together, discuss, and engage in dialogue so that one of us can

defeat the other and have them change their faith. We told those people time and again, "*The place for this is certain kinds of academic settings, not conferences wherein we seek common ground and cooperation*" We want to listen in order to correct misconceptions, to dissolve the ice, to find what is common, and to cooperate for the sake of worshipping God, engaging in positive development, and purifying the human soul. Therefore, we do not advocate public debates that fuel provocative emotions among followers of both religions. We reject this constant provocation that generates hatred and accordingly instability and division among the citizens of one nation. We assert that academic debate must be between scholars and take place in academic institutions, not in the haphazard way that it sometimes occurs.

Today, in this meeting, we hope to transcend the concept of dialogue and find partnership. We want to begin to administer practical programs based on the concept of collaborative work. We need academic cooperation in the area of civil society and non-governmental organizations for the sake of comprehensive development and in order to establish a just and permanent peace in the world, for the sake of eradicating and controlling disease, ignorance, and the unrest that claims human lives.

We have a long way ahead of us, but the potential for cooperation between the two parties is vast. We ask God to bless our efforts and to grant us strength and courage so that we can enjoy the peace that we are all striving to attain.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=75

Wilton Park Speech

Source: Ali-Gomaa.com

The greater goals of Islam are to preserve and protect life, the intellect, religious belief, human dignity, and private property. For us, as Muslims, these rights have been elevated to sacred duties, such that no one can deny or forfeit them, even if they were to claim that it is their right to do so. And these goals and values form the foundation of liberal democracy.

We have to make an essential distinction between Islam and the way Muslims practice it. The application of Islam by the ignorant, however pious they may be, does not reflect the truth of this religion. The pure, authoritative interpretation of Islam is the only benchmark by which we can evaluate the actions of Muslims. For this reason we need to take our understanding of Islam from those who are qualified to interpret it – and there are clear, unambiguous standards for those who are qualified to interpret Islam – and not from anyone who simply practices Islam, no matter how pious he or she is. Unfortunately, the western media has unknowingly promoted extremism by labeling any and all religious opinions as ‘fatwas’, to the point that the word itself now has an evil connotation. In reality, nothing could be farther from the truth. A fatwa can only be issued by trained scholars. Calling every opinion a ‘fatwa’ has given unseen aid to extremists and terrorists. Opinions delivered by unqualified Muslims have been given strength and foundation by this grand title. If these statements were defined as personal opinions, they would not have as much impact on the general public nor would they receive public support.

Throughout its history, Islam has never been a theocratic state. Rather, Islam created a paradigm for a non-ecclesiastical political system that adheres to the tenants of religion and acts in accordance with its ethical values and its prohibition of corruption. An indication of this is that over the past hundred and fifty years Muslims have accepted the implementation of democracy as a system to ensure justice, political participation, multi-partisanship, a division of the branches of government, and checks and balances. With the support of qualified Islamic scholars Muslims around the world chose to establish republics and constitutional monarchies, and institutional states and constitutional states without thinking they had thereby discarded Islam.

We can say that the principles shared by the West and the Muslim world, remain today. This underlying reality, however, has been obscured by political and economic interests that exacerbate the differences between the Muslim world and the West and cover over the values and principles they share. We can work toward changing this state of affairs through transparency, dialogue, mutual interest, and sincere cooperation for the improvement of all humanity.

I have come to England many times before in coordination with the Anglican Church, Cambridge University, and the British Government in order to build this bridge between the Muslim world and the West, which I hope we can construct for the sake of our children and our grandchildren.

I hope event will be a beginning, and not an end in itself. One of the ways to achieve this is to begin a translation project on both sides between Arabic and English through which we can get to know each other, and by allowing each side to express its self clearly free of accusations. Will we awake one morning to a world in which peace has taken the place of bloodshed, mutual cooperation has taken the place of hegemony, and transparent honesty has taken the place of deceit? We certainly hope so, and it is towards this end that we are working.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=77

Chapter 2: Islam in the Modern World

Key positions:

- Flexibility is one of the defining characteristics of the Islamic legal tradition and an integral part of the cultural output of Muslims.
- Islamic law is both a methodology and the collection of positions adopted by Muslim jurists over the last 1,400 years. Those centuries were witness to no less than 90 schools of legal thought, and the twenty-first century finds us in the providential position to look back on this tradition in order to find that which will benefit us today. This is one of the first steps in the issuing of a fatwa (religious opinion/ruling).
- Fatwas represent the bridge between the legal tradition and the contemporary world in which we live. They are the link between the past and the present, the absolute and the relative, the theoretical and the practical.
- This flexibility is present in the Islamic political sphere as well, but this is a point that is often missed. Many assume that an Islamic government must be a caliphate, and that the caliph must rule in a set and specific way. There is no basis for this vision within the Islamic tradition. The caliphate is one political solution that Muslims adopted during a certain historical period, but this does not mean that it is the only possible choice for Muslims when it comes to deciding how they should be governed.
- The principles of freedom and human dignity for which liberal democracy stands are themselves part of the foundation for the Islamic worldview; it is the achievement of this freedom and dignity within a religious context that Islamic law strives for.
- The flexibility and adaptability of Islamic law is perhaps its greatest asset. To provide people with practical and relevant guidance while at the same time staying true to its foundational principles, Islam allows the wisdom and moral strength of revelation to be applied in modern times. It is through adopting this attitude towards the shari'a that an authentic, contemporary, "moderate" and tolerant Islam can provide solutions to the problems confronting the Muslim world and the West today.

Articles & News of the Grand Mufti on the Issue of Islam in the Modern World

Islam and modernity

Source: Contending Modernities

As the conveners of this conference note, modernity is not simply a particular epoch in the history of the world, but also a set of very large and important structural and material changes affecting people throughout the globe. It is a condition in which we all now live, and which we must confront with the intellectual resources of not only the modern world, but also our traditions and heritage (*turath*). It has too often been the case that to think about modernity has been to limit oneself to the European experience—the changing economic configurations, the wars of religion, and emerging political arrangements—as a model for how modernity should be understood the world over. This is no doubt in part because thinking about the concept of modernity—its nature and essence—has itself a long history within European writings.

However, as the world becomes increasingly interconnected through technological advances, we are now beginning to appreciate the differing experiences of the world's many cultures in their encounters with the complex of institutions and ideas that we identify as modernity. In particular, we have the new concept of "*alternative modernities*," a term which goes a long way in representing the diversity of the world in encountering new realities. So, whereas it was previously thought that to be modern meant to distance oneself from religion and tradition, it is becoming evident that community leaders have throughout the centuries found innovative and creative ways to merge religion and tradition with new advances in technology, politics, and economics. That is, it was, and is, possible to remain authentic to one's religious traditions—even in the West—while still being a modern person.

A history of inclusion

This is no less the case in the Islamic world than it is in the West or elsewhere. But this should not surprise us. Islamic cultures have a long tradition of welcoming other philosophies and civilizations. His-

torically, the Islamic civilization was a moral and humanistic civilization that encompassed a variety of religions, doctrines, philosophies and peoples; in short, Islam contended with diversity, pluralism, and multiculturalism long before the modern West came into existence.

We see ourselves as a people who have absorbed a multiplicity of civilizations; throughout our history, we have been exposed to and assimilated the great civilizational accomplishments of the Persians, Indians, Chinese and Greeks into our cultural and intellectual life. Just as we benefited from them, we in return contributed to them. Islam places people and worshippers above places of worship. This humanitarian and cosmopolitan worldview does not allow us to consider ourselves as superior to other people. We are proud of our civilization, but we do not reject other civilizations; rather, all who work towards the constructive development of the world should be considered our partners. Since our civilization is concerned with humanity first and foremost, it brings together both the spiritual and the material, the Muslim and the non-Muslim. This history should demonstrate that Islam is not, nor has it ever been, a static, authoritarian system devoid of flexibility. So, today, to live in accordance with Islam does not necessitate a return to the Middle Ages, nor does it require that we cease to be who we are. Islam has never required its adherents to give up their own cultures and become Arabs. This is why we see a vast variety of cultural, artistic, scientific and civilizational accomplishments, all of which can be described as Islamic, and that we can all as Muslims be proud of. These range from the Taj Mahal in India, to the winding streets of Fez, to the poetry composed by English converts that represents not only the rigor of English verse, but also encompasses the beauty of Islamic piety.

Flexibility, fatwas, and authority

This flexibility is not just present in the cultural output of Muslims. It is an integral part of the Islamic legal tradition as well; in fact you could say it is one of the defining characteristics of Islamic law. Islamic law is both a methodology and the collection of positions adopted by Muslim jurists over the last 1,400 years. Those centuries were witness to a remarkable intellectual diversity—no less than 90 schools of legal thought—and the twenty-first century finds us in the providential position of being able to look back on this tradition in order to find that which will benefit us today. This is one of the first steps in the

issuing of a fatwa. Many in the Western world have come to identify the fatwa with some unfortunate pronouncements of political or self-appointed religious leaders. But fatwa-giving is in fact one of the most important institutions in the endeavour to properly understand the relationship between Islam and the modern world. In an attempt to provide Muslims with authoritative guidance about their religion, muftis look not only to the vast legal tradition, but must also conduct a proper examination of the lived reality of Muslims, in order to provide them with relevant rulings. In effect, fatwas and Muftis represent the bridge between the long-standing intellectual-legal tradition of Islam and the contemporary world in which we live. They are the link between the past and the present, the absolute and the relative, the transcendent and the contingent, the theoretical and the practical. For this reason it takes more than just knowledge of Islamic law to issue a fatwa. Muftis are required to have an in-depth understanding of the world in which they are living and the problems that their communities are facing. When those who lack these qualifications issue fatwas the result is the extremism we see today.

We have to be clear about what is at stake here. When each and every person's unqualified opinion is considered a fatwa, we lose a tool which is of the utmost importance to reign in extremism and preserve balanced understandings of Islam. We may point to any number of declarations posing as fatwas from extremists and terrorists as examples of how grave the consequences are of not following the historical Islamic example of differentiating between those with scholarly standing and authority and those without. The Muslim world has been particularly successful at creating institutions and bodies whose long-standing service to the community confer upon them legitimacy that cannot be had simply by someone with access to modern media. This is no time to abandon that example. This flexibility I speak of is not a new phenomenon. In fact, it has always been an in-built part of the Islamic legal tradition, and especially the fatwa-giving process. Scholars have long argued that fatwas are available to being modified and updated as a result of changing circumstances (ahwal), the flow of history (zaman), the reality of geographical diversity (makan), and different peoples (ashkhas). Consider the words of the famous Ottoman Syrian jurist Ibn Abidin who insists in the 18th century that one of the essential requirements of a mufti is that he be knowledgeable of the customs of his people, and that he give fatwas in accordance with them, to the extent that he should give a fatwa in contradiction to

a previous fatwa of his own if he thinks it to be more responsive to his present constituency's customs. *"For many rulings change as a result of changing customs, or because of necessity, to the extent that following an outdated ruling may entail undue hardship and harm, which would be in opposition to the principles of sharia which insist upon facilitating things for people, so that the world may remain orderly and stable."*

One of the most famous personalities in Islamic history is the famous scholar of Medina in the 2nd Islamic century, Malik bin Anas. Imam Malik is well-known for his adamant defense of the right to free thought, even in the face of persecution. However, when he was approached by the Caliph of the time with a proposal to make his entire dominion subject to the rulings in Malik's famous *Muwatta'*, Malik refused, saying *"Leave the people of each locality to themselves and what they have chosen."* Through this simple statement, Imam Malik set a precedent of intellectual and legal diversity in the Islamic world, that led to a vibrant culture of scholarship and tolerance throughout the centuries.

The flexibility of Islamic politics

Thus, it should be clear that Islamic law has always contained within itself the capacity to adapt to new challenges. However, this flexibility is present in the Islamic political sphere as well—though this is a point that is often missed. In order to further explore this contention, we may do well to concentrate on the Egyptian experience, which is at once particular and generally instructive, and carries within it many examples for our understanding of Islamic culture and politics.

It is widely assumed that an Islamic government must be a caliphate, presumably because this is the form it took in its earliest period. However, this is just one political arrangement Muslims adopted during a certain historical period, and this does not mean that it is the only possible choice for Muslims when it comes to deciding how they should be governed. The experience that Egypt went through can be taken as an example of this flexibility. The nineteenth century was a period of cultural, social and political development in Egypt. This period of development was begun by Muhammad Ali Pasha and was continued by the Khedive Ismail who attempted to build a modern state. This meant a reformulation of Islamic law, but not a rewriting of it, nor an abandoning of previous elements of Islamic law.

Many people are under the impression that Egypt adopted French law wholesale. This is not the case. Here we must draw a distinction between form and substance. While Islamic law was rewritten in the form of French law codes, it retained its Islamic essence. The result of this process was that Egypt became a liberal state run by a system of democracy. It aimed at a separation of powers and a functional constitutionalism, with codified law, enshrining the equality of citizens and respect for fundamental freedoms. However all of this took place with a healthy respect for the prevailing culture of Egyptians, and an acknowledgement of the Sharia as one of its constituent elements. Indeed, recent scholarship on modern Egyptian history is slowly accepting that Muhammad Ali Pasha, as innovative and modern as he was, was also a product of the Islamic (Ottoman and Mamluk) cultures which he inherited, and in which he grew up.

And even when his grandson Isma'il Pasha wanted to distance himself from the Ottoman legacy by establishing a parliament, elections, and a codified legal system, he never intended this as a way to escape the Islamic Shari'a, but rather to give it a new form which would allow the faithful Muslim to emerge into the modern world as both a believer and a citizen. This is why it was established in writing in the Egyptian code of 1883, whose first article proclaimed that no other articles may invalidate a right established by the Islamic Shari'a. It is also why the early attempts at codification resembled very strongly in content the findings of earlier legal schools (madhahib).

Indeed, these were carried out by prominent Islamic scholars, educated in the Islamic legal tradition, such as Qadri Pasha and Abd al-Razza al-Sanhuri Pasha. The breadth of learning of these figures was incomparable. And even though other jurists at the time may have opposed these developments, everyone recognized their qualifications and religious devotion, and none of them saw their efforts as anything approaching an abandonment of religion. Consider, for example, the position of one conservative scholar, who though he actively voiced his objection to the approach of Sanhuri, never had it occur to him that such an approach could be thought in any way un-Islamic. It must be understood clearly that the advent of modernity in Egypt was never accompanied by the supposedly inevitable retreat of religious sentiment. Rather, religious sentiment continued to flourish even as the nation modernized. The overwhelming lesson of this example, and of Islamic history as a whole, is that Muslims are free to

choose whichever system of government they deem most appropriate for them, provided they respect and uphold basic principles of equality, freedom and human dignity. Indeed, these principles for which liberal democracy stands are themselves part of the foundation for the Islamic world view; it is the achievement of this freedom and dignity within a religious context that Islamic law strives for.

Why modern progress depends on religious authority

It is no secret to those attending this conference that the world has witnessed tremendous change over the last two hundred years. This change often came in the form of new technologies and political ideologies. New communications technologies developed allowing us to be aware of what is happening in nearly every part of the world the instant that it occurs, whereas in the past it would take months if not years for even the most urgent news to spread. New cultural and political developments have caused us to think of the world and our place in it in new ways. This wave of change has caused a complete alteration of nearly every aspect of our lives, including the way we think about ourselves and others. It is this modern occurrence that presents the greatest challenge to Muslim jurists and Muftis. The challenge is how to ensure that Muslims are participants and partners in the modern world, confronting new realities with wisdom and balance, while remaining faithful to our religious traditions.

This is something that I, as the Grand Mufti of Egypt, take very seriously. It is a responsibility entrusted to the Muslim nations' leaders, and we must approach it with wisdom and caution. Islam is often portrayed as the stereotypical example of everything that is wrong with religious societies. And there are some key issues that are regularly pointed to as examples. However, the Dar al-Ifta or the National Fatwa Office , the body I head as Grand Mufti and which has been the central source of authority for Egyptians for more than one hundred and fifty years in matters related to Sharia, has been key in seeking to advance reasonable, religiously authentic, responses to these issues. And we would do well to pay more attention to them. Consider, for example, the issue of women. Islam is firmly in favour of gender equality. Although Muslim sources affirm divinely-bestowed differences between men and women, both genders enjoy spiritual equality. Within the Islamic worldview, these natural differences are thought to give rise to differing roles, complementary roles that are equally

necessary for the healthy and wholesome unfolding of humanity. While men are tasked with the responsibility of providing for their family, the woman also has roles as nurturer and educator, which is the reason behind the Prophet's response to one of his companions when he was asked who was most deserving of the companion's love and respect: "*Your mother, then your mother, then your mother, then your father.*"

Many have distorted this natural difference to permit discrimination, especially in the form of barbaric activities. An example of this is the very serious problem of female genital mutilation (FGM). The Prophetic example makes clear that this was not something he ever encouraged or practiced. More to the point, as I made clear in a fatwa issued after a scientific conference on the topic convened by Dar al-Ifta in 2006, it is a transgression against a particularly sensitive body part, and if carried out to an extreme degree merits proper punishment. Another issue which has caused a good amount of consternation among Western circles is with respect to Islam's position on certain corporal punishments. What is ignored, however, is the way in which many scholars have adapted an important principle from the Prophet to apply to the modern world. It is reported that the Prophet said: "*Ward off corporal and capital punishments when possible. If there is an excuse available, avail yourself of it. For it is better that the ruler errs in the direction of punishment than the direction of forgiveness.*" Many scholars have come to the conclusion that the particular circumstances of the modern world render this an era in which the utmost caution must be exercised, and therefore, such punishments ought to be suspended as it was suspended before when particular circumstances merited doing so.

Of course, the most famous—and the most unfortunate—issue that is associated with Islam is that of terrorism. It cannot be stated strongly enough that terrorism is opposed to everything Islamic law stands for. Islamic law is a sophisticated and humane system which mandates very precise rules for warfare. I have laid these out very clearly in a fatwa which prohibits the use of weapons of mass destruction. Those who undertake such activities not only commit crimes against their victims—many of whom are innocent women and children—and breach international agreements and treaties, but they overstep their boundaries, and place an unjustifiable burden on the rest of the Muslim community. The consequences of such actions are catastrophic,

and will only lead to further bloodshed. Rather than cause enmity among peoples, it is imperative that we work together in order to address some of the enormous challenges facing humanity. I have been vocal about the need for Muslims to cooperate with other communities and nations to avert the impending environmental crises. Islam contains itself within the resources, as some like the Prince of Wales have noted, to contribute towards the preservation and protection of our environment, because Islam views the environment as God's creation to whom we must interact with love and respect. In the Islamic paradigm, creation is in a state of constant obedience to God, and nature loves those who obey God and grieves over their passing from the world.

I must reiterate, however, that these enlightened positions are only possible if we delegate authority in the Muslim world to its proper leaders. In both Islam and other religions we are witnessing a phenomenon in which laypeople without a sound foundation in religious learning have attempted to set themselves up as religious authorities, even though they lack the scholarly qualifications to authentically interpret religious law and morality. It is of course true that every Muslim—learned or illiterate, rich or poor—stands before his Lord with his God-given status as a spiritual entity given to him at birth, and judged only by his conduct and sincerity throughout his life. However, this should not distract us from realizing that a society functions through delegation of responsibilities and tasks. It is the sacred duty of those who have spent their lives in pursuit of scholarship and learning to interpret the finer aspects of morality and law—those that cannot be arrived at through the unmediated application of one's conscience, but call for an engagement with scripture and exegesis.

It is eccentric and rebellious attitudes towards the humane tradition of learning that characterizes Islam that give rise to extremist interpretations that have basis in neither reality nor Islam. The aim of self-appointed religious authorities is purely political and has no religious foundation. It is to create havoc and chaos in the world. And the first step in creating that chaos is to marginalize the sane mainstream voices of Islam's natural and long-acknowledged leaders, its Muftis and jurists. Our role as religious leaders who have spent our lives carefully studying our religion and our people is to re-assert our rightful authority. I have, through my present position, set out to outline an authoritative picture of Islam. This demands a proper appreciation of the

flexibility and adaptability of Islamic law—perhaps its greatest asset. To provide people with practical and relevant guidance while at the same time staying true to its foundational principles, Islam allows the wisdom and moral strength of religion to be applied in modern times. It is through adopting this attitude towards the Sharia that an authentic, contemporary, moderate, and tolerant Islam can provide solutions to the problems confronting the Muslim world today, and in which Islam can partner with other religious and secular people and institutions to offer solutions to the many problems currently confronting the entire world and all humanity.

Shaykh Ali Gomaa is Grand Mufti of Egypt. One of the most respected jurists in the Sunni Muslim world; he heads the Dar al Ifta, which issues thousands of fatwas per week. This post is the text of the remarks that were delivered on behalf of Shaykh Ali Gomaa at the public launch of Contending Modernities on November 18, 2010.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=100

<http://blogs.nd.edu/contendingmodernities/2010/11/22/islam-and-modernity/>

Is Sharia law reconcilable with modernity?

Source: The Washington Post

Among the claims made against the man behind the mosque near Ground Zero, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, is the assertion that he wants to bring Sharia law to the United States. In fact, Rauf has done considerable work to reconcile Sharia and America. His wife, Daisy Khan, characterized the imam's beliefs this way:

Rauf sees the United States as "the most sharia-compliant state" because it upholds what Rauf believes is the proper interpretation of the Koran's emphases on protection of life, freedom of religion, one's property, family, dignity. Ali Gomaa, Egypt's Grand Mufti, explains Islamic religious law and Sharia:

Islam is not a static, authoritarian system devoid of flexibility. To live in accordance with Islam does not necessitate a return to the Middle Ages, nor does it require that we cease to be who we are. Islam has never required its adherents to give up their own cultures and become Arabs. This is why we see a vast variety of cultural, artistic, and civilizational phenomena all of which can be described as Islamic ranging from the Taj Mahal in India, to the winding streets of Fez, to the poetry composed by English converts that represents not only the rigor of English verse, but also encompasses the beauty of Islamic piety.

This flexibility is not just present in the cultural output of Muslims. It is an integral part of the Islamic legal tradition as well; in fact you could say it is one of the defining characteristics of Islamic law. Islamic law is both a methodology and the collection of positions adopted by Muslim jurists over the last 1,400 years. Those centuries were witness to no less than 90 schools of legal thought, and the twenty-first century finds us in the providential position to look back on this tradition in order to find that which will benefit us today. This is one of the first steps in the issuing of a fatwa. Fatwas represent the bridge between the legal tradition and the contemporary world in which we live. They are the link between the past and the present, the absolute and the relative, the theoretical and the practical. For this reason it takes more than just knowledge of Islamic law to issue a fatwa. Muftis must also have an in-depth understanding of the world in which they are living and the problems that their communities are facing. When those who lack these qualifications issue fatwas the result is the

extremism we see today. We have to be clear about what is at stake here. When each and every person's unqualified opinion is considered a fatwa we lose a tool which is of the utmost importance to reign in extremism and preserve the flexibility and balance of Islamic law. This flexibility is present in the Islamic political sphere as well. But this is a point that is often missed. Many assume that an Islamic government must be a caliphate, which was one of the political solution that Muslims adopted during a certain historical period, but this does not mean that it is the only possible choice for Muslims when it comes to deciding how they should be governed. The experience that Egypt went through can be taken as an example of this. This period of development was begun by Muhammad Ali Pasha and was continued by the Khediv Ismail who attempted to build a modern state. This meant a reformulation of Islamic law, but not a rewriting of it. Many people are under the impression that Egypt adopted French law. This is not the case.

Islamic law was rewritten in the form of French law, but retained its Islamic essence. This process led Egypt to become a liberal state run by a system of democracy. None of the Muslim scholars of Egypt objected to this. Muslims are free to choose whichever system of government they deem most appropriate for them. The principles of freedom and human dignity for which liberal democracy stands are themselves part of the foundation for the Islamic world view; it is the achievement of this freedom and dignity within a religious context that Islamic law strives for.

The world has witnessed tremendous change over the last two hundred years. This change came in the form of new technologies and political ideologies. There were also new communications technologies developed allowing us to be aware of what is happening in nearly every part of the world the instant that it occurs, whereas in the past it would take months if not years for even the most urgent news to spread. This wave of change has caused a complete alteration of nearly every aspect of our lives. It is this modern occurrence that presents the greatest difficulty to Muslim jurists and Muftis. In the past, there was little alteration of the way things worked and progressed. Even when things changed it was slow and isolated to a handful of fields. The change of the past two hundred years, however, has made it necessary to re-examine how everything works. Meaning that the way in which Islamic law is applied must take into account this change.

The flexibility and adaptability of Islamic law is perhaps its greatest asset. To provide people with practical and relevant guidance while at the same time staying true to its foundational principles, Islam allows the wisdom and moral strength of religion to be applied in modern times. It is through adopting this attitude towards the Sharia that an authentic, contemporary, moderate, and tolerant Islam can provide solutions to the problems confronting the Muslim world today.

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http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2010/08/is_sharia_law_reconcilable_with_modernity.html

Fatwas and modernity

Source: The Washington Post

London - Almost two years ago the citizens of London were victims of a great atrocity. Those who perpetrated those crimes would like you to believe that they were inspired by the religion of Islam. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is nothing in Islam that could ever justify these blatant acts of aggression. Islam calls on Muslims to be productive members of whatever society they find themselves in. Islam embodies a flexibility that allows Muslims to do so without any internal or external conflict. This is why we see a vast variety of cultural, artistic and civilisational phenomena all of which can be described as Islamic, ranging from the Taj Mahal in India to the winding streets of Fez to the poetry composed by English converts that represents not only the rigor of English verse, but also encompasses the beauty of Islamic piety.

This flexibility is not just present in the cultural output of Muslims; it is an integral part of the Islamic legal tradition as well. In fact, you could say it is one of the defining characteristics of Islamic law. Islamic law is both a methodology and the collection of positions adopted by Muslim jurists over the last 1,400 years. Those centuries were witness to no less than 90 schools of legal thought, and the twenty-first century finds us in the providential position to look back on this tradition in order to find that which will benefit us today. This is one of the first steps in the issuing of a fatwa (religious opinion/ruling).

Fatwas represent the bridge between the legal tradition and the contemporary world in which we live. They are the link between the past and the present, the absolute and the relative, the theoretical and the practical. For this reason it takes more than just knowledge of Islamic law to issue a fatwa. A Mufti who does not know the contemporary world in which he/she lives is like a person who has the ability to walk and might also have the ability to run. However, they move through a dark path without a light in their hand. It is possible that they will make it, but in most cases they will fall and perish. Muftis must also have an in-depth understanding of the problems that their communities are facing. When those who lack these qualifications issue fatwas the result is the extremism we see today, the kind witnessed on 7/7. We have to be clear about what is at stake here.

When each and every person's unqualified opinion is considered a fatwa we lose a tool that is of the utmost importance for reigning in extremism and preserving the flexibility and balance of Islamic law. This flexibility is present in the Islamic political sphere as well, but this is a point that is often missed. Many assume that an Islamic government must be a caliphate, and that the caliph must rule in a set and specific way. There is no basis for this vision within the Islamic tradition. The caliphate is one political solution that Muslims adopted during a certain historical period, but this does not mean that it is the only possible choice for Muslims when it comes to deciding how they should be governed.

The experience that Egypt went through can be taken as an example of this. The period of development begun by Muhammad Ali Pasha and continued by the Khedive Ismail was an attempt to build a modern state. This meant a reformulation of Islamic law. This process led Egypt to become a liberal state run by a system of democracy without any objections from Muslim scholars. Muslims are free to choose whichever system of government they deem most appropriate for them. The principles of freedom and human dignity for which liberal democracy stands are themselves part of the foundation for the Islamic worldview; it is the achievement of this freedom and dignity within a religious context that Islamic law strives for. The world has witnessed tremendous change over the last two hundred years. This change came in the form of new technologies and political ideologies. There were also new developments in communications allowing us to be aware of what is happening in nearly every part of the world the instant that it occurs, whereas in the past it would take months if not years for even the most urgent news to spread. This wave of change has caused a complete alteration of nearly every aspect of our lives.

It is this modern occurrence that presents the greatest difficulty to Muslim jurists and Muftis. In the past there was little alternation of the way things worked and progressed. Even when things changed it was slow and isolated to a handful of fields. The change of the past two hundred years, however, has made it necessary to re-examine how everything works. Meaning that the way in which Islamic law is applied must take into account this change. The flexibility and adaptability of Islamic law is perhaps its greatest asset. To provide people with practical and relevant guidance while at the same time staying true to its foundational principles, Islam allows the wisdom and moral

strength of revelation to be applied in modern times. It is through adopting this attitude towards the shari'a that an authentic, contemporary, "moderate" and tolerant Islam can provide solutions to the problems confronting the Muslim world and the West today. Muslims must hold fast to this tradition in order to stand in the face of those who would use our religion for their own agendas.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=88

http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2007/06/fat-was_and_modernity.html

Issuing incorrect fatwas is uncommon, says Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa

Source: Daily News Egypt

CAIRO: The fatwa - and who is authorized to issue it - has been the focus of many debates over the past few years, especially with the increased number of venues that issue it.

With the boom in independent media and satellite stations, televised fatwas and TV preachers have gone from being a short-lived phenomenon to staples of our daily lives.

But Al Azhar, and other well-established scholars from respectable institutions around the Muslim world, have heavily criticized these fatwas. Prior to the holy month of Ramadan, Grand Mufti Sheikh Ali Gomaa talked to Daily News Egypt about the process of issuing a fatwa and surveyed the current religious scene.

Daily News Egypt: How would you define a 'fatwa'?

Sheikh Ali Gomaa: The fatwa is a judgment based on Islamic law (sharia). If a fatwa is not related to [this type of] judgment then it is merely a response to a question and not a fatwa. A fatwa always shows the five main legal judgments in sharia, which decide if something is religiously prohibited (haram), an obligation (wajib), unacceptable (mahzour), frowned upon (makrouh), or religiously permissible (halal). The fatwa describes the human actions in one of the previous five judgments.

There is a big difference between a fatwa and a normal question. For example, a question that asks: Did Prophet Mohamed (PBUH) get married to Maria the Copt? I respond by saying no. [It was a different case.] This is not a fatwa; this is a response to a question. Also, the situations and events that I attend are not considered fatwas. If I attend a conference or give a speech at Friday prayer, this is never a fatwa. The problem is that people always mix the fatwa with normal answers to questions. Therefore, you find people describing the religious speech as a fatwa .They say there is chaos in issuing fatwas, but actually the chaos is not in the fatwas; it is rather in the religious speech. When we browse the satellite channels we find that preachers who give religious speeches are sometimes extremists; sometimes

they simplify things for people; and some other times they talk about politics, spiritual issues, or interpreting dreams. So, people have started to become religiously disturbed. They ask which of these things can be considered correct fatwas.

If someone is interpreting dreams, this is never a fatwa. There is a problem in religious speech, not in the fatwa. A fatwa is rarely mistakenly issued, unless it is issued from an unspecialized person. Fatwas that are issued by unspecialized people and that do not relate to sharia are very rare.

Who is authorized to issue a correct fatwa?

The official Mufti in Egypt is the Grand Mufti who is authorized to issue a fatwa. The rest of the people are unauthorized to issue any fatwas. There is no an official permit for issuing a fatwa. The Mufti is appointed by scholars and professors of Al-Azhar University. The Mufti in Egypt is now the 18th Mufti; the previous Muftis were all prominent scholars who have been successful in their roles and duties at Dar El-Iftaa. How far do you believe in the credibility of religious preachers who issue fatwas to people on various TV channels?

The whole point about issuing a fatwa (Iftaa) is that it is considered a science in itself. This science is quite similar to the science of medicine. In the medical field, there are students, there are graduates, and the graduates have different specializations. A graduate might specialize in ophthalmology for example, so it is improper that patients who suffer from cardiac diseases go to ask an ophthalmologist for a consultation. What does an ophthalmologist know about cardiac diseases? Nothing, he might have some general knowledge, but he cannot practice surgery in cardiology because he is not fully knowledgeable on this specialization. Also, a doctor holding a bachelor's degree differs from someone who holds a masters degree or a doctorate. The matter is exactly the same in issuing fatwas. There is a student at Al-Azhar, a fresh graduate and scholar; and each of them has his own specialization and experience. At Al-Azhar, there are different specializations and degrees exactly as in medicine. If we fully understand this concept, then we can differentiate between scholars and evaluate their credibility when it comes to issuing fatwas and answering questions. Every sharia scholar is qualified to answer questions that are related to the main nonnegotiable Islamic pillars or obligations,

general questions about trade, pilgrimage, or marriage. But when it comes to detailed specialized matters, then not every scholar is capable of this. Scholars should refer particular topics to a higher ranking scholar who is more knowledgeable in this field. It also depends on the question, whether it is related to the individual, society as a whole, or the entire Muslim nations (Umma). Is the question simple or complex?

How do you explain the difference between scholars in judging certain issues?

The difference between scholars may stem from their differences in defining and describing the subjects in question. For example, legislators and economists have been giving different definitions for banks. They have different definitions as to what a bank is. Legislators say that a bank is an association that is responsible for loans and debts. According to sharia scholars, this is considered usury (rebah), but economists maintain that a bank is an institution that works in savings and investments. So if a scholar issued his fatwa according to the definition of an economist, then dealing with a bank would never be religiously prohibited. So the difference is not between scholars, but rather in the definitions that vary from one scholar to another. This difference also occurred in many other issues in history. Photography is one of the issues that has proven controversial. Some say a picture is religiously prohibited, then another person comes along and says that a picture is nothing but a shadow captured on paper. So photography is not banned on religious grounds by scholars who base their fatwas on the description that says that a picture is a captured shadow. Scholars have also varied in their definition of coffee, because in the Arabic language coffee means wine. So people said it is banned. But the influence of coffee on a person is totally the opposite of that of wine. Coffee is rich in caffeine and makes people very alert, while wine makes people nearly unconscious. So the difference is clear here, despite the meaning of coffee in the Arabic language. That is why I always urge all scholars to study the circumstances and facts surrounding the subject before judging.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=22

<http://www.masress.com/en/dailynews/113543>

Applying Shari'ah in Today's World (Fatwa)

Source: Ali-gomaa.com

The issue of implementing the shari'ah needs to be understood in a broader manner than its restriction to the application of corporal punishments (hudud) for crimes as is widespread in both Muslim and non-Muslim contemporary literature. The implementation of the shari'ah is multifaceted and has different grades, so it would be unjust to describe a given situation as not implementing the shari'ah just because some of its rulings are transgressed in daily life. These transgressions occurred in different ways and to various degrees over the course of Islamic history in all Muslims countries and nations. Not a single Muslim scholar said that these countries had left the realm of Islam or that they were not implementing the shari'ah. In fact it would not be farfetched if we were to claim that the "the implementation of the shari'ah" is a modern term.

Realities that need to be understood:

1) The shari'ah refers to that which has to do with beliefs, world view, which is comprised of the fact that this universe is created by a Creator, that human beings are held responsible by legal rulings describing their actions, that this responsibility arises from the revelation that God sent with His Messengers and revealed in His Books, and that there is a Day of Judgment when rewards and punishments will be meted out. The shari'ah is also comprised of jurisprudence, which regulates the procedure of personal, communal, and societal conduct, an ethical system, a means of spiritual development, intellectual and interpretive methodologies for dealing with revelation in the form of both the Quran and the Sunna, and methodologies for dealing with the world no matter how it changes and no matter how complex it becomes.

2) The issue of corporal punishments (hudud) has two aspects: The first is the belief in the preeminence of this penal system in deterring crime, as well as an assertion of the gravity of these sins, the extent of their grossness, their negative impact on society, and a personal rejection of them in all of their forms; and the belief that this penal system is not inherently unjust or violent in and of itself. The other aspect is that Islamic law has set conditions for the implementation of these corporal punishments as well as certain situations in which their

implementation would be temporarily halted or suspended. The implementation of corporal punishments in these situations or in the absence of its conditions would amount to a departure from the shari'ah.

3) Anyone who closely examines Islamic legal texts will find that corporal punishments were not instituted for the purpose of revenge, but to deter crimes before they are committed. They will also find that Islamic law does not seek out their implementation as much as it seeks out pardon, forgiveness, and their protection from them. The texts in this regard are numerous.

4) Corporal punishments have not been implemented in countries like Egypt for over one thousand years. This is because the legal conditions for their implementation, which describe specific means for establishing [guilt] and stipulate the possibility of retracting a confession, are not met. All of this is summed up by the saying of the Prophet, "*Prevent [the implementation of] corporal punishments by means of uncertainties,*"¹ and, "*To err by pardoning is better than to err by punishing.*"²

5) A certain period of time may have characteristics that necessitate the general application of exceptions even though exception, by their nature, are to be applied in isolated cases. These characteristics, which include it being an age of necessity, an age of doubt and uncertainty, an age of discord, and an age of ignorance, have an effect on legal rulings. Necessity permits the impermissible even if it becomes prevalent and continuous, which is why they permitted burial in the –Fasaqi of Egypt in spite of its being contrary to the law; uncertainty permits the discontinuation of corporal punishment as was done by Umar ibn al-Khattab in the year of ash when doubt became prevalent since the legal condition for implementing corporal punishments was lost. Imam Jafar al-Sadiq and al-Kirkhi from the Hanafi school, as well as others, held that the impermissibility of looking at improperly clothed women was not applicable in countries of central Asia since they did not wear the hijab and lowering one's gaze became difficult if not impossible. In his book al-Ghiyathi Imam al-Juwaini stipulated the conditions of the age of ignorance making it clear what people are meant to do in the absence of mujtahids, then in the absence of religious scholars, then in the absence of the sources of the law. What scholars of juristic methodology, like al-Razi in the al-Mahsul, referred to in their books as 'rational abrogation,' which is the result of the disappearance of the object (al-mahal) in the ruling, is linked to this.

This is a more exact term for, according to the consensus of the community, reason cannot abrogate firmly established rulings, rather the ruling is not implemented if its object has vanished. For example, the command to make ablutions made washing the hands to the elbow one of its integrals, but if one's arm has been amputated this becomes impossible; the case is similar with such rulings as those based on having slaves, the greater khilafa, or using gold and silver coins.

6) In order to arrive at the implementations of the legal rulings that God intended by them, and obedience to God and His messenger we must understand the reality [in which we live]. The advice [given to] David's people is related in *Shu'b al-Iman* according to Wahb ibn Munabih, "*The intelligent person should have knowledge of his time, hold his tongue, and embrace his role.*"³ It follows that the jurists clearly stated that rulings change with the change of times if they were originally based on custom (the text of article 90 of *Majalah al-Ahkam al-'Adliyah*). In the sphere of monetary transactions, the Hanafi school permitted invalid transactions [conducted] in non-Muslim lands, so the ruling changed in accordance with the change in location. The legal maxim states, "*Necessity permits the impermissible,*" which is taken from His saying But he who is driven by necessity, neither craving nor transgressing, it is no sin for him. Lo! God is Forgiving, Merciful,⁴ makes circumstances change with a change in conditions. These rulings also change with a change in persons; rulings pertaining to actual people possessed of reason are different from those pertaining to an artificial legal person (*al-shakhsiyah al-'itibariyah*) who do not possess reason. These four aspects of time, place, persons, and states are those that al-Qarafi sited as being aspects of change that must be taken into consideration when rulings are being applied to reality.

It is well known that in this age of ours yesterday does not survive, and today does not live through tomorrow. There are many reasons for this, such as mass communication, transportation, and modern technologies, all of which have made it such that it is as if people are living in one village; also the exponential growth in population which has not decreased since 1830, as well as the intellectual disciplines which have been developed in order to realize the interior states of human beings, or their roles as members of society, or as beings living under the conditions that we have mentioned. The characteristics of this age have changed many concepts, such as the concept of contracts, liability, delivery of goods, usufruct, and legal politics.

We must realize all of this in order for the greater goals of the shar'iah not to be lost.

7) We can examine the attempts of modern Islamic countries to implement corporal punishments:

i) We find that Saudi Arabia implements corporal punishment directly through Islamic courts without legal texts formulated as laws for a criminal penal code. The Saudi implementation of corporal punishment is firmly established and there are no effective calls or approaches to cancel or halt it, even if there are some calls from those who oppose the [Saudi] political system seeking to regulate its procedures describing the current system as being unjust and an infringement on human rights.

ii) Then there is the situation of Pakistan, Sudan, one of the states of Nigeria, one of the states of Malaysia, and Iran whose legal codes include Islamic corporal punishment. The practical application of corporal punishment has been halted in Pakistan, its cessation occurred in Sudan after the reign of al-Namiri, it has been halted in Iran and Malaysia, and is implemented in one state of Nigeria in an extremely limited manner. In all of these countries castigation (*ta'zir*) is commonly used instead of implementing corporal punishment (*hudud*) except in the case of crimes that necessitate execution.

iii) The rest of the Islamic countries, which number 57 out of the 196 countries in the world, remained silent in their legal code on the issue of corporal punishment (*hudud*). The perspective adopted in this case is that our age is one of general uncertainty, and the Prophet said, "*Avert [the implementation of] corporal punishments by means of uncertainties.*"⁵ Also the witnesses who are legally eligible to establish criminal activity that necessitates corporal punishment have not existed for a long time. Al-Tanukhi relates in his book *Mashawir al-Muhadirah*, "*A judge used to enter a district or a village and find forty witnesses of the sort with whom we are satisfied as to their being just and accurate, while today a judge enters a town and only finds one or two witnesses.*"⁶ And our age can generally be described as one in which there are no witnesses. Investigations undertaken to arrive at the truth, which lead to the implementation of corporal punishments, are not part of the method of the shari'ah.

Ma'iz confessed [to having committed fornication], and the Prophet turned his face away from him four times, then he turned him over to his family with the hopes that they would testify that he was mentally impaired or insane, then he came up with loopholes for him, and when Ma'iz recanted while the punishment was being carried out, the Prophet said to 'Umar, "*Why didn't you let him go?*"⁷ The scholars understood from this that it is permissible to go back on one's confession as long as it has to do with the rights of God, as opposed to the rights of man. Also, the Prophet never asked about the other party to the crime, nor did he seek her out even as a kind of completion to the investigation. It has also been narrated concerning Abu Bakr, 'Umar, Abu Darda', and Abu Hurayrah that thieves would be brought to them and they would say, "*Have you stolen? Say, 'No'.*" The textual evidence for corporal punishments essentially indicates the greatness of the sin for which the punishments were legislated; that they are enormous and grotesque crimes that require this severe punishment. This results in preventing people from committing these crimes, as God says, With this doth Allah appal His bondmen. O My bondmen, therefor fear Me! [39:16].

In this regard corporal punishments help complete the social order that is born of the dominant culture of viewing these sins as enormous and repudiating those who have been known to commit them, have made their sins public, or exhibited pride in committing them. At the same time the shari'ah left the door of repentance open and enjoined the concealment [of sin] in many texts from the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

With this brief overview we have shown the legal origins and description of the implementation of the Shari'ah, as well as the way in which this is played out in reality, and the place of corporal punishments therein.

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Chapter 3: Religion and Politics

Key positions:

- Egypt is a deeply religious society, and it is inevitable that Islam will have a place in our democratic political order. This, however, should not be a cause for alarm for Egyptians, or for the West.
- Egypt's religious tradition is anchored in a moderate, tolerant view of Islam. We believe that Islamic law guarantees freedom of conscience and expression (within the bounds of common decency) and equal rights for women.
- Acknowledgment of a nation's religious heritage is an issue of national identity, and need not interfere with the civil nature of its political processes. There is no contradiction between Article 2 and Article 7 of Egypt's interim Constitution, which guarantees equal citizenship before the law regardless of religion, race or creed.
- An important distinction needs to be made between polity and politics and the relationship between religion and these two concepts. Polity is about seeking the best interest of the people through political means and in this regard religion is closely related to polity as one of the fundamental roles of religion is to care for people's interest. When it comes to politics on the other hand, it has to do with political partisanship and specific strategies by governments or parties to achieve certain goals which may very well differ by the passage of time and the change in political leadership. Religion should not be involved in this type of political race and should refrain from being involved or engaged in it. Articles & News of the Grand Mufti on the Issue of Religion and Politics.

In Egypt's Democracy, Room for Islam

Source: The New York Times

Constitutional amendments that will pave the way for free elections. The vote was a milestone in Egypt's emerging democracy after a revolution that swept away decades of authoritarian rule. But it also highlighted an issue that Egyptians will grapple with as they consolidate their democracy: the role of religion in political life. The vote was preceded by the widespread use of religious slogans by supporters and opponents of the amendments, a debate over the place of religion in Egypt's future Constitution and resurgence in political activity by Islamist groups. Egypt is a deeply religious society, and it is inevitable that Islam will have a place in our democratic political order. This, however, should not be a cause for alarm for Egyptians, or for the West.

Egypt's religious tradition is anchored in a moderate, tolerant view of Islam. We believe that Islamic law guarantees freedom of conscience and expression (within the bounds of common decency) and equal rights for women. And as head of Egypt's agency of Islamic jurisprudence, I can assure you that the religious establishment is committed to the belief that government must be based on popular sovereignty.

While religion cannot be completely separated from politics, we can ensure that it is not abused for political gain. Much of the debate around the referendum focused on Article 2 of the Constitution — which, in 1971, established Islam as the religion of the state and, a few years later, the principles of Islamic law as the basis of legislation — even though the article was not up for a vote. But many religious groups feared that if the referendum failed, Egypt would eventually end up with an entirely new Constitution with no such article.

On the other side, secularists feared that Article 2, if left unchanged, could become the foundation for an Islamist state that discriminates against Coptic Christians and other religious minorities. But acknowledgment of a nation's religious heritage is an issue of national identity, and need not interfere with the civil nature of its political processes. There is no contradiction between Article 2 and Article 7 of Egypt's interim Constitution, which guarantees equal citizenship before the law regardless of religion, race or creed. After all, Denmark, England and Norway have state churches, and Islam is the national religion of

politically secular countries like Tunisia and Jordan. The right of Egypt's Christians to absolute equality, including their right to seek election to the presidency, is sacrosanct. Similarly, long-suppressed Islamist groups can no longer be excluded from political life. All Egyptians have the right to participate in the creation of a new Egypt, provided that they respect the basic tenets of religious freedom and the equality of all citizens. To protect our democracy, we must be vigilant against any party whose platform or political rhetoric threatens to incite sectarianism, a prohibition that is enshrined in law and in the Constitution.

Islamists must understand that, in a country with such diverse movements as the Muslim Brotherhood; the Wasat party, which offers a progressive interpretation of Islam; and the conservative Salafi movements, no one group speaks for Islam. At the same time, we should not be afraid that such groups in politics will do away with our newfound freedoms. Indeed, democracy will put Islamist movements to the test; they must now put forward programs and a political message that appeal to the Egyptian mainstream. Any drift toward radicalism will not only run contrary to the law, but will also guarantee their political marginalization.

Having overthrown the heavy hand of authoritarianism, Egyptians will not accept its return under the guise of religion. Islam will have a place in Egypt's democracy. But it will be as a pillar of freedom and tolerance, never as a means of oppression.

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http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/02/opinion/02gomaa.html?_r=0

Let fundamental reforms bring a new, peaceful Egypt

Source: Contending Modernities

Attacks on demonstrators merit the strongest condemnation

It is with a heavy heart that I have watched the events of the past few days unfold. Violence is always regrettable, but to watch my own country deteriorate into virtual chaos is a cause of unimaginable grief and sadness, and the recent attacks against demonstrators are worthy of the strongest condemnation. The land of Egypt is dear not only to me, and to its 80 million citizens, but indeed to the whole world for its fundamental and substantial contributions to human civilization for over seven millennia. To see it in such a state of chaos is truly heart-wrenching.

There is, however, reason for hope and optimism. As the Qur'an teaches us, "*With every difficulty, there comes ease.*" It is with great national pride that I affirm my confidence and trust in the Egyptian people that they will refrain from violence and aggression and to return to peace and calm. At that point, our nation will have the capacity to engage in some profound introspection and soul-searching to make sense of the new state of affairs.

Until then, however, the lives and welfare of our countrymen—regardless of their political beliefs—must be our first priority. Security must be ensured, the rule of law must be respected, and people's basic needs must be met. These considerations must take precedence in such a time of crisis. I salute those who have demonstrated immense courage in protecting their families and their neighborhoods in the face of indiscriminate looting.

Fundamental reforms are needed—right now

There is no denying that we are on the edge of a new period of Egyptian political and social life. The youth of our nation have organized en masse to raise their demands and make their voices heard, hoping for change. They have demonstrated great resolve in their pursuit of fundamental reforms, and indeed reform is a necessity. Indeed, I have long called—through the Misr El Kheir Foundation—for

comprehensive reforms in economics, health, and social solidarity. This foundation supports educational efforts, scientific and medical research, and environmental initiatives by drawing on the expertise of the business community to channel funds towards the needy and vulnerable in Egypt.

I add my voice to calls to engage in dialogue, and urge that the time has now come to translate all of these calls into tangible results. Practical steps must be undertaken to ensure an immediate and direct implementation of serious reform measures. The current situation we are living in is unprecedented—lives have been lost, people have been injured, homes and businesses have been looted. It is unacceptable that our fellow citizens should be subjected to such danger. It should be the demand of every citizen that those who have perpetrated such violence be brought to full justice for their crimes.

Egypt is much more than its president

Egypt must rise united and triumphant after this period of crisis. Egypt is much more than its presidential figure. It is a nation of richness, culture, and sincerity, and its contributions and history speak for themselves. It is a nation made by its people; genuine and dedicated. It is a country of crucial political importance to the region, and it is in the interest of all involved in the international community to do their utmost to help its people ensure its stability and prosperity. I reiterate my confidence in the Egyptian people to work with them towards this ultimate goal.

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<https://blogs.nd.edu/contendingmodernities/2011/02/07/let-fundamental-reforms-bring-a-new-peaceful-egypt/>

Change Requires Both Reform and Renewal

Source: Suhaibwebb.com

we welcome President Barack Obama on the occasion of his upcoming visit to Egypt and his anticipated speech to the Muslim world. We hope that this visit will bring about improved relations, which I think can only happen through an improvement in political relations. In my opinion this can only occur through a series of practices and positions that the intellectuals and religious scholars of the Muslim world hope for. In order to be more specific, I have a few points that may be summarized as the following:

We would like there to be perpetually open channels for continuous scientific cultural, economic, and technological dialogue between us and the United States. This can only be achieved in an environment that respects international law and the resolutions of the United Nations as they are related to the central problem for Muslims, which is Palestine and the aggression committed against the Palestinian people in the form of occupation, blockades, settlements, and the denial of basic rights such as water, work, freedom of movement, education, and life. Additionally, the glaring physical aggression of arrests and murder, which we consider the United States of America to be capable of intervening positively in order to stand up for what is right and put an end to extremist voices that call for perpetual conflict and the reaffirmation of the concepts of occupation, tyranny, and the destructions of the rights of peoples.

Something to be aware of is that Islam is capable of thriving in every age and of building bridges with all civilizations. This is affirmed by history and all Islamic sources. This requires engaging in dialogue with moderate Islam and relying on it as an authoritative reference for mutual understanding between the Islamic world and the West. This is for the sake of a more illumined tomorrow and for balanced cooperation through which both the Muslim world and the United States will realize benefits in a just and continuous manner with neither party being transformed into mere objects for the acquisition of ends that conflict with their own interests and do not last. If we do this faithfully it will lead to the end of acts of genocide that breed more rage and complicate matters in the long run, which is what none of us want. Occupation can never be in accord with defending the rights of peoples or true and balanced cooperation which must be fostered between

the Islamic world and the United States in order to bring an end to poverty, disease, ignorance, and to protect the future of humanity. The basis for what we have mentioned is present in the Qur'an in a number of verses: Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him) [3:64], which is what calls us to love of God and love of neighbor. As for love of God, everything in our lives is based on love of God. The Qur'an says, Say: Lo! My worship and my sacrifice and my living and my dying are for God Lord of the Worlds. He hath no partner. This am I commanded, and I am first of those who surrender (unto Him). Say: Shall I seek another than God for Lord, when He is Lord of all things? Each soul earneth only on its own account, nor doth any laden bear another's load. Then unto your Lord is your return and He will tell you that wherein ye differed [6:162-164].

As for love of neighbor, the Quran says, It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces to the East and the West; but righteous is he who believeth in God and the Last Day and the angels and the Scripture and the prophets; and giveth wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor-due. And those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress. Such are they who are sincere. Such are the God-fearing [2:177].

And the Prophet (May the peace and blessings of God be upon him) said, "*None of you believes until they love for their brother – or their neighbor – what you love for yourselves.*" And he also said, "*Creatures are the children of God, so the most beloved of God among you are those who are of the most benefit to His children.*"

In order to work towards peace in the region, and in the entire world, we must put an end to the slander against Islam and Muslims, which has portrayed Muslims as the greatest enemy of Western civilization, which is not true at all. These campaigns of slander led by some research institutes which continue to reiterate the old positions of orientalism and do not take into consideration a reality that is of the utmost importance, which is that reformist politics must originate and

not imitate. This means that in order to last and have an effect in the world they must issue forth from the reality of their society, its cultural frame, the convictions of its people, their vision of the world, humanity, and life, and their traditional beliefs and religions that they follow. Without this, a politics of reform cannot survive and cannot have a real effect in the world in which we live. These institutes must not forget that diversity, which is a matter that is affirmed by modern democracy, must have a reality on the ground. Following from this is the necessity of respecting Islamic customs and putting a halt to suggestions of direct intervention in matters that are particular to this religion. We pray to God most high that this visit is a good beginning and the occasion for a new understanding. We pray for sincere intentions in order to actualize a future that is more stable and more cooperative in building human civilization, for God is the most gracious of lords and the most gracious responder to prayers.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=89

<http://www.suhaibwebb.com/islam-studies/change-requires-both-reform-and-renewal-by-dr-ali-gomaa/>

Egypt's new era is one of hope and unity, not revenge

Source: The National

Following Hosni Mubarak's resignation, Egypt today stands at the dawn of a new era, one born of the ingenuity, sacrifice and dedication of an entire nation. We remember and recognise all those brave men and women who lost their lives, but not before igniting and galvanising the movement of change. The past 20 days have been a testament to the spirit and integrity of the Egyptian people. With great pride we witnessed their exemplary behaviour during some of the most turbulent moments in the nation's history. At times, it was unclear what the next day held - whether food shortages would prove debilitating, whether the safety of the people would be assured, or whether the situation would spiral out of control. However, history bears witness that it is in times of difficulty that the Egyptian spirit of community asserts itself most. The display of national unity has been remarkable - people from all walks of life have joined together to imagine a better future. Religious, social and economic differences were put aside: it was Egypt as a whole that was on display for the world.

It is important to acknowledge at this juncture the crucial role played by the armed forces in maintaining peace throughout the nation, asserting their respect for, and unity with, the Egyptian people. As they embark on this transitional phase, we have every confidence that they will ensure the welfare of the nation transcends all else. The new era in which we stand is one of hope. It was built on an agenda of reform. While that agenda has largely focused on political and constitutional reforms, this is the moment to remind ourselves that this is simply the beginning. To foster a truly healthy civil society, we need to take measures to ensure economic and social reform as well. This requires the continued goodwill and dedication of all Egyptians. This is not beyond our reach. Now is the time to seize the moment and achieve truly comprehensive and far-reaching reforms. We must continue to be united in solidarity, working towards a better future, and putting Egypt above all else. This is a moment of hope, and not of revenge. Islamic teachings ask that we not dwell on the past, and instead move forward, active and alive, focused on creating a better future. Egypt has a unique ability to remember the positive contributions of its historical figures, whatever their faults. Let old grievances neither divide us nor eat away at the spirit that has characterised this noble uprising.

I have been at pains during my tenure as the Grand Mufti to stress inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue. In particular, I was asked to participate in a pioneering initiative to promote cooperation between Christendom and the Muslim world. It is with great pleasure that I became a signatory of "*A Common Word Between Us and You*", a declaration in which Christian and Muslim leaders highlight their common bonds, and their dedication to the welfare of their societies through their devotion to God.

This is an important time to affirm that the Dar al-Ifta, Egypt's supreme body for Islamic Legal Interpretation, remains at the service of the Egyptian people, offering religious guidance on all matters. We have always remained independent of political affiliations and have been providing pragmatic guidance to all those who seek it. We support the aspirations of the Egyptian people, and we call on all citizens to ensure the safeguarding of the five overriding objectives of Islamic law - the preservation of life, property, honor, family and reason - values shared by all humanity. For the past few years, the Dar al-Ifta has made great strides in restructuring the organization to enhance accessibility and responsiveness, incorporating new technologies along the way. The past few weeks have inspired us to embark on a set of initiatives to move further along this path, improving communications. These include a presence on social media (Facebook, Twitter), meetings with youth and media regularly, as well as an expansion of our translation department which already provides religious guidance in nine languages.

The new era is one on which we embark together as a nation, full of hope, trusting in God, and determined to make Egypt prosper. My sincere prayers and wishes for an orderly and peaceful transition of power and a constitution that fulfills the aspirations and needs of the people.

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http://www.ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=155

<http://www.thenational.ae/the-national-conversation/comment/egypt-s-new-era-is-one-of-hope-and-unity-not-revenge>

Egyptian Revolution One Year Later: Challenges and Prospects

Source: Annual Dialogue Report on Religion and Values 2011

The New Year is an opportune time to reflect on the first twelve months of a new Egypt, one that has witnessed momentous change and the emergence of a new set of possibilities in a country that had met with frustration and stagnation. Before the great revolution of the 25th of January, political activism on the part of the masses had become alarmingly impoverished, and public displays of national unity had given way to sectarianism and discord.

This year, we continue in a transitional phase, with elections not yet complete, constitutional design still being considered, and the precise details of governance in the new Egypt yet to be settled upon. The emergence of these new developments are indeed encouraging, as are the care with which these institutions are being designed, and the zeal with which the entire country has participated in political reform, intently watching and voicing their concerns at every stage. An important element of the new terrain we find ourselves in is the need to understand the contours of the religious field in the new Egypt. Related to this is the question of what must be done to maintain a safe, secure and successful transition which is maximally respectful of the religious sensibilities of the Egyptian people, while still finding a way to forge forward to build a progressive and productive Egypt in the twenty-first century.

The current flux associated with the political transition has illuminated many important aspects of the religious field, but the cacophony of voices clamoring to be heard may serve to obscure other features. Among the former, we have seen the positive role played by the Grand Imam, Shaykh Ahmed el-Tayyib, in brokering an agreement on a way forward through the “Azhar Document”, a blueprint for resolving the constitutional debates and controversies that had threatened to divide the nation in the immediate aftermath of the revolution. This document has been warmly received by both Egyptians and concerned observers outside the country, as it lays the groundwork for an Islamically authentic mode of arguing for basic human rights, constitutional protections and guarantees for freedoms. Indeed, the impetus towards political reform has reached into the Azhar itself, as the Grand Imam announced plans to return to Azhar’s roots by re-instituting the

Council of Senior Clerics which had defined the institution for many years. Among the powers of this Council will be the right to select any future Shaykh alAzhar, a marked departure from the appointment process that had been the sole prerogative of the state. On the other hand, we have also seen much hand-wringing and dismay over the recent election results, in which Islamist parties have made serious gains. It bears noting that the rise of these parties can be attributed to a number of factors, not least of which is the weakened state of serious political discourse, and as a result any viable political opposition, under the Mubarak regime. As a result, voters were not left with many options that they felt were respectful of their Islamic heritage and their religious sympathies. Even more significantly, however, despite the widespread use of the word "Islamist," we must be careful not to group all parties and members of these groupings under the same tent. Even among themselves, Islamists represent often widely divergent positions on central issues such as the economy, minority rights, and the precise role of religion in the public sphere. Though I may often disagree with the particulars of their stances, their success should be no cause for serious alarm in the Western world. Indeed, we are optimistic that for the most part, flexibility will take precedence in their political programs over doctrinaire readings of ideology.

In order to ensure that this is the case, however, more attention needs to be paid to what might be termed the Azhari paradigm. This is the long-standing social arrangement of authority, prestige and influence which has obtained between the Egyptian people and the institutions associated with the Azhar. Despite a recent uptick in conservative spirit and fervor, the bond between the Azhar and Egyptians remains strong. It is a bond based on recognition of Azhari learning, piety, and a concern for its constituents, as well as Introduction 3 its willingness to stand up for Egyptian culture and society over the centuries in the face of foreign influence and intrusion.

Egyptian society is by nature a tolerant and understanding culture. Egyptians have centuries of experience dealing with other peoples from all walks of life. This is a reality that cannot be underestimated, and it is one we must understand if we are to make headway in contributing towards the strengthening of a humane, tolerant Egypt, respected among the nations of the world. The appropriate reaction to the significant gains of the Islamist parties is not to grow pessimistic at the emergence of the phenomenon, but rather to be aware of it, and to

remain steadfast and constant in speaking out for moderation and engage with them seriously about the many challenges our country is inevitably facing in the very near future. Much remains to be accomplished in the transition of the country to a stable and successful model of Arab and Islamic flourishing.

However, the Islamic faith teaches us that optimism and activism are constituent features of what it means to live a good life – constantly striving to do good works, with a strong faith that those good works will contribute towards the wellbeing of one's community. Let this be a call to Egyptians and indeed to their well wishers across the world, to continue along this path, and to complete that which has been started, with dignity and determination.

http://www.ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=147

Chapter 4: Religion Vs Sectarianism and Terrorism

Key positions:

- There is no religion worthy of the name that does not regard as one of its highest values the sanctity of human life. Islam is no exception to this rule.
- What we have learnt about Islam has been taken from the clear, pristine, and scholarly understanding of the Quran: “O people, we have created you from a single male and female and divided you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another.”
- Terrorism cannot be the outcome of any proper understanding of religion. It is rather a manifestation of the immorality of people with cruel hearts, arrogant souls, and warped logic.
- Despite their confused claims, terrorists are miscreants who have no legitimate connection to the pure Islamic way, whose history and orthodox doctrine are testaments to the Islamic commitment to tolerance, compassion and peace.
- The Prophet considered non-Muslims and Muslims as participating in a social contract that was inviolable. The promise of a Muslim is sacrosanct, for as he said: *“Whoever unjustly persecutes one with whom he has an agreement, or short-changes his rights, or burdens him beyond his capacity, or takes something from him without his blessing, I myself will be an argument against him on the Day of Judgement.”* What sort of Muslim not only deprives himself of the intercession of the Prophet of God in front of his Lord, but indeed puts himself at odds with him?

Articles & News of the Grand Mufti on the Issue of Sectarianism and Terrorism

What role will Islam play in the new Egypt?

Source: The Washington Post

The recent wave of sectarian violence Saturday night which claimed a dozen lives and left hundred wounded made my heart ache in a country where Christians and Muslims have lived together in peace for centuries. It is vital for the peace of the region and wider world that the place of all religious communities and their full participation in society should continue to be fully protected and assured. We therefore welcome the firm resolve and assurances of all those in authority to make sure such crimes will not continue to happen.

All Egyptians stand united against such behavior. Sectarian conflict is foreign to Egypt, and those who seek to use this as a pretext to stoke sectarian tensions need to be opposed in everyway possible. At such a sensitive moment, we Egyptians must not participate in the spreading of rumors of such tensions. Rather, we must remain united to ensure that they do not become a self-fulfilling prophecy, and continue to treat each other with the goodness and respect that has long characterized Egyptian society. This is in the best tradition of both Christianity and Islam which call upon us to observe without compromise the two great commandments to love God, and to love our neighbor.

I join many others in Egypt and around the world in expressing my deep condolences to both the Christian and Muslim families of the victims and speed recovery for the wounded. It is my solemn hope and prayer that this new era brings solace to their hearts, continuing calm to our nation, and a resolve from all Egyptians to work towards a peaceful future. In the series of momentous events that our nation has been going through, we must move forward to implement the reform programs we all so ardently desire. Integral to this is to continue to stay tuned to the true spirit of the revolution and not to allow divisions to compromise the unity that has been so evidently on display among the great Egyptian people. Many more steps must follow if our country is to fulfill its aspirations for a full transition. In order to achieve our goals, the country must not allow itself to be sidetracked by minor issues and trivialities, sectarian division, or political

infighting. Instead, we must maintain our focus on the important challenges and issues affecting the future of our nation at this critical juncture. One of the questions that has been raised in debates recently is about the role of religion and Muslim activists and groupings in the creation of a new Egypt. Egyptians are a deeply spiritual people, marked by a profound sense of religiosity. The Egyptian experience with Islam has been one of great tolerance and inclusion. Infused with a deep spiritual sense, Egyptian vision of Islam has always been one of flexibility and understanding. Islam, on this understanding, is not a static, authoritarian system unable to adapt to a changing world. Rather, it is a worldview which demands constant engagement and interaction with the world. This is as true of the Islamic legal tradition as it is of any other part of the religion.

This spirit of moderation, tolerance and flexibility is well reflected in the paradigm of al-Azhar which has long served the Egyptian people, by not only producing first-rate scholars, thinkers and intellectuals, but also by providing educational opportunities for men and women, instilling in them an ethic of integrity, leadership and service and devoting itself to spreading a balanced vision of Islam based on recognized and orthodox ideals infused with spiritual depth. We are confident in this great institution's ability to restore its status as a historical giant, and exert its influence on the articulation of Islam in Egypt and throughout the Muslim world. Now is the time to support institutions that seek to articulate Islamic discourse suitable to the world we live in with impeccable scholarly credentials, and the worldwide prestige necessary to succeed in creating a better world.

As the Grand Mufti of Egypt, I announced that I will invite the various Islamic groupings and factions in the country to engage in dialogue and discussion regarding the state of the nation in the wake of recent political changes, and to study the various issues that now confront us. This proposal to hold a set of meetings is part of a far-reaching effort to set aside intra-religious differences and divisions among the various Islamic trends in Egypt, and instead strive for unity towards "a common word," as the Koran advises us. The aim is to arrive at an agreement which can then be presented to the citizenry at large as a clear and focused program of unity and understanding. The only precondition for these meetings are those without which dialogue is impossible: a commitment to avoid from the outset the raising of irrelevant points of disagreement and meaningless accusations; as well

as a desire to understand the matters before us carefully and thoroughly before undertaking or advising any action to address them. In a letter addressed to all of the leaders and scholars of the various Islamic orientations, I announced my willingness to host these meetings at the premises of the Dar al-Ifta, the National Fatwa Office in accordance with Dar al-Ifta's historic role in facilitating and guiding the religious landscape of the country. The Dar al-Ifta and its personnel are willing to go to whatever lengths are necessary to accomplish a unity of purpose and program of tolerance among the religious groups, and to work in the best interests of the various regions and individuals of the country.

I stressed that it is necessary that all parties agree to implement the position endorsed by numerous scholars that anyone who adheres to one of the recognized schools of thought must be considered a Muslim, and treated as one. Under no conditions may he be deemed an infidel, and his blood, honor, and wealth remain inviolable. It is equally impermissible to anathematize followers of the Ash'ari doctrine of Islamic theology, those who practice legitimate Sufism or those who adhere to the authentic way of the salaf. In sum, it is forbidden to anathematize any group of Muslims that believe in God, His Messenger, and the fundamentals of faith, respects the fundamental ritual practices, and denies nothing that is unquestionably known to be part of the religion.

Rather, the principle which should guide any such meetings will be love of God, a love of nation, a love for one's neighbor and unifying our cause in serving the wellbeing of our nation. Every effort must be made to unify the Muslim community on the agreed-upon religious foundations. All parties wishing to participate in them must do so with open ears and hearts, for it is only through mutual understanding that we will come together. This framework alone will enable these meetings to proceed in a productive manner, acting upon that which we agree, and putting aside that upon which we disagree. While we are adamant that all Muslim groups must be allowed to participate fully in the creation of the new Egypt, and exercise all associated rights, we feel duty-bound to stress that any group must not claim to monopolize the interpretation of Islam as if they hold the unquestionable and divine truth, thereby precluding other interpretations and understandings of the role Islam is to play in the new Egypt. Our understanding of the role Islam is to play in Egypt is that of a custodian

and advocate of the religious and social welfare of all Egyptians, and a representative of the community at large.

Ali Gomaa is the current Grand Mufti of Egypt and one of the world's most recognizable Muslim scholars.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/guest-voices/post/what-role-will-islam-play-in-the-new-egypt/2011/05/10/AFz3nrgG_blog.html

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=123

There is No Place for Terrorism in the Practice of Islam

Source: Daily News Egypt

There is no religion worthy of the name that does not regard as one of its highest values the sanctity of human life. Islam is no exception to this rule. Indeed, God has made this unequivocal in the Quran by emphasising the gravity of the universal prohibition against murder, saying of the one who takes even one life that "*it is as if he has killed all mankind*". Islam views murder as both a crime punishable by law in this world and as a major sin punishable in the afterlife as well. Prophet Mohammad said: "*The first cases to be decided among the people on the Day of Judgment will be those of bloodshed.*"

The Islam that we were taught in our youth is a religion that calls for peace and mercy. The first Prophetic saying that is taught to a student of Islam is: "*Those who show mercy are shown mercy by the All-Merciful. Show mercy to those who are on earth and the One in the heavens will show mercy to you.*" What we have learnt about Islam has been taken from the clear, pristine, and scholarly understanding of the Quran: "*O people, we have created you from a single male and female and divided you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another.*"

Terrorism, therefore, cannot be the outcome of any proper understanding of religion. It is rather a manifestation of the immorality of people with cruel hearts, arrogant souls, and warped logic. It is thus with great sadness and outrage that we witness the emergence of this disease in our nation with the recent bombing outside a church in Alexandria that killed over 20 Egyptian citizens. There is no doubt that such barbarism needs to be denounced in the strongest of terms, and opposed at every turn. Just as importantly, we must counter the deviant beliefs that underpin such gross transgressions. Despite their confused claims, terrorists are miscreants who have no legitimate connection to the pure Islamic way, whose history and orthodox doctrine are testaments to the Islamic commitment to tolerance, compassion and peace.

The Quran is clear that "God has honoured the children of Adam." Islam therefore makes no distinction among races, ethnicities, or religions in its belief that all people are deserving of basic human dignity. Furthermore, Islam has laid down justice, peace and cooperation as the basic principles of interaction between religious communities,

advising Muslims that the proper conduct towards those who do not show aggression towards us is to act with goodness and justice. Indeed, this is the way of the true Muslim, for “God loves the just”.

As in all matters, the Prophetic example is the best of all models. The Prophet considered non-Muslims and Muslims as participating in a social contract that was inviolable. The promise of a Muslim is sacrosanct, for as he said: *“Whoever unjustly persecutes one with whom he has an agreement, or short-changes his rights, or burdens him beyond his capacity, or takes something from him without his blessing, I myself will be an argument against him on the Day of Judgement.”* What sort of Muslim not only deprives himself of the intercession of the Prophet of God in front of his Lord, but indeed puts himself at odds with him?

This act of terrorism was an affront to all Egyptians. It must not be used to sow discord in a country where Christians and Muslims have lived together in peace for centuries. It is vital for the peace of the region and wider world that the place of all religious communities and their full participation in society should continue to be fully protected and assured. We therefore welcome the firm resolve and assurances of all those in authority to make sure this will continue to happen. Together with the Bishop of London, my co-chair at the C1 Foundation for building peaceful relations between the western and Islamic world, we always made clear that everybody needs to understand that any act of violence, crime or terror is an action against God, faith and religion. Whoever declares crime in the name of God or any religion is false and nothing other than a criminal who needs to face the power of the legal system. Let me be clear by reiterating that Islam is utterly against extremism and terrorism but unless we understand the factors that provide a rationalisation for terrorism and extremism, we will never be able to eradicate this scourge. This must be understood in order to build a better future that can bring an end to this grave situation that is destroying the world.

All Egyptians stand united against such behaviour. Sectarian conflict is foreign to Egypt, and those who seek to use this as a pretext to stoke sectarian tensions need to be opposed in every way possible. At such a sensitive moment, we Egyptians must not participate in the spreading of rumours of such tensions. Rather, we must remain united. We must continue to treat each other with the goodness and respect that has long characterised Egyptian society.

My heart, my thoughts, and my prayers go out to the families who have lost their loved ones. We offer our deepest and sincerest condolences to the families of the victims and pray for a speedy recovery of the wounded.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=101

<http://dailynewsegyp.com/2011/01/03/terrorism-cannot-be-the-outcome-of-any-proper-understanding-of-religion/>

Christian-Muslim clash: We must build a sectarian-free Egypt

Source: The Washington post

A Christian cleric clasps hands with a Muslim sheikh during a rally to demonstrate the unity between Muslims and Christians at Tahrir Square in Cairo March 11, 2011. The rally is taking place after recent sectarian clashes that killed thirteen people. REUTERS/Mohamed Abd El-Ghany

All Egyptians - Christian and Muslim - have a fundamental right to live in safety. Acts of sectarian violence are an affront to the entire nation and must be met with a unified front. The future of Egypt depends on the cooperation and goodwill of all its citizens, and now is the time to work towards good; now is the time to banish sectarianism from our vocabularies once and for all.

As Egypt turns a chapter in its history, it is important to remember that as we cast away injustices of the past, we must never cast away what has made our nation strong and resilient. We should never compromise our national unity and we must honor the sacred duty to remain true to our principles, to insist as the Qur'an teaches us: "*to stand firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even if it be against your selves.*" To do otherwise is to risk losing our rich traditions of tolerance, our social unity and cohesion, indeed "*our very selves*" to the forces of instability and violence. The recent tensions between Muslims and Christians in Egypt are a reminder that much work lies ahead of us. Both faith traditions teach the sanctity of human life and importance of coexistence. The Qur'an teaches that to kill an innocent person is the equivalent of killing all of humanity. Not only are places of worship considered sacred spaces within the confines of Islamic law, but, more importantly, human life is considered sacred. Transgressing these bounds is a grave sin that will only lead to turmoil in this life and the life to come. The Islam that we were taught in our youth is one that calls for peace and mercy. The first prophetic saying that is taught to a student of Islam is, "*Those who show mercy are shown mercy by the All-Merciful. Show mercy to those who are on earth and the One in the heavens will show mercy to you.*" What we have learned about Islam has been taken from the clear, pristine, and scholarly understanding of the Qur'an, "*O people we have created you from a single male and female and divided you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another.*"

This sort of violence cannot be the outcome of any proper understanding of religion. It is rather a manifestation of the immorality of people with cruel hearts, arrogant souls, and warped logic. There is no doubt that such barbarism needs to be denounced in the strongest of terms, and opposed at every turn. Now is not the time for voices of reason to prevail, now is time for the peacemakers to take action. The sectarian violence must end. Egyptians are sick and tired of using painkillers and bandages to cure the chronic sectarian disease. A solution that addresses the deep roots of the sectarian quagmire is urgently needed as we move into this new era. I believe the solution lies in putting into practice and actualizing the full meaning of citizenship which accords every citizen, regardless of religious affiliation, equal rights and responsibilities before the law.

I call upon the Egyptian and international media to take part in promoting a sectarian-free Egypt. I call upon the educators to review the school curricula to make sure they are free from sectarian biases and stereotypes. I call upon all the political, administrative and executive players to facilitate the full participation of all Egyptians to build the new Egypt.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa is the Grand Mufti of the Arab Republic of Egypt - the second highest religious position in the country. He oversees the premier institution in the Muslim world for religious legal direction, Dar al-Ifta al-Misriyyah.

http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2011/03/christian-muslim_clash_we_must_built_a_sectaraian-free_egypt.html

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=108

A New Egypt

Source: Contending Modernities

In the aftermath of Mubarak's resignation, Egypt stands at the dawn of a new era. It is an era borne of the ingenuity, sacrifices and dedication of an entire nation. We remember and recognize all those brave men and women who lost their lives but have ignited and galvanized the movement of change. The past month has been a testament to the spirit and integrity of the Egyptian people. It is with great pride that we witnessed the exemplary behavior of Egyptians during some of the most intense and anxious moments in the nation's history.

The past few weeks were indeed difficult. At times, it was unclear what the next day held—whether food shortages would prove debilitating, whether the safety of the people could be assured, or whether the situation would spiral out of control. However, history bears witness that it is in times of difficulty that the Egyptian spirit of community asserts itself the strongest. The display of national unity over the past few weeks has been remarkable—people from all walks of life have joined together to imagine a better future. Religious, social and economic differences were put aside.

Egypt on display for the world

It was Egypt as a whole that was on display for the world over the past few weeks, and it is Egypt that has emerged into a new era. It is important to acknowledge at this juncture the crucial role played by the armed forces in maintaining peace throughout the nation, asserting their respect for and unity with the Egyptian people, and ensuring that the welfare of the nation transcends all. As they embark on this transitional phase, we have every confidence that they will continue to place these values at the top of their agenda and live up to their stated commitments. The new era in which we stand is one of hope. It was built on an agenda of reform. While that agenda has largely focused on political and constitutional reforms, this is the moment to remind ourselves that this is simply the beginning, and that Egypt needs much more than this. To foster a truly healthy and vibrant society, we need to seize the moment and take measures to ensure economic and social reform as well. This requires the continued goodwill and dedication of all Egyptians.

As recent events have shown, this is not beyond our reach. Now is the time to take advantage of the revolutionary moment and achieve truly comprehensive and far-reaching reforms that will help all members of society. We must continue to be united in solidarity, working towards a better future, and putting Egypt above all else.

It is important to point out that this moment is one of hope, and not one to satisfy old grudges. Islamic teachings emphasize that we not dwell on the past, and instead move into the future, active and alive, focused on creating a better future. Egypt has a unique ability to continue to remember the positive contributions of the various personalities in our nation's history, despite their faults. Let us continue this tradition, and let old grievances neither divide us nor eat away at the spirit that has characterized this noble uprising.

Islam & Christianity, together in society's service

I have been at pains during my tenure as the Grand Mufti to stress inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue. In particular, I was asked to participate in the pioneering initiative to promote cooperation between Christendom and the Muslim world. It is with great pleasure that I became a signatory to the declaration entitled "A Common Word Between Us and You," in which Christian leaders joined with Muslim ones to emphasize their similarities and their dedication to the welfare of their societies as a result of their devotion to God.

This is an important time to affirm that the Dar al-Iftaa, Egypt's supreme body for Islamic Legal Interpretation, remains at the service of the Egyptian people, prepared to offer religious guidance on all matters of national and international importance. We have always remained independent of political affiliations and orientations and have been providing pragmatic guidance to all those who are looking for authoritative guidance and we will continue to do so. We support the aspirations of the Egyptian people in the coming era, and we call on all Egyptians to ensure the safeguarding of the five overriding objectives of Islamic law—the preservation of life, property, honor, family, reason, and religion—values that are of course shared by all humanity. For the past few years, the Dar al-Iftaa has made great strides in restructuring the organization to enhance accessibility and responsiveness, incorporating new technologies along the way.

The circumstances of the past few weeks have inspired us to embark on a set of initiatives to move further along this path, improving lines of communication with the people. These include a presence on social media (Facebook, Twitter), meetings with youth and media regularly, as well as an expansion of our translation department that already translates religious guidance into nine languages. The past month has deeply affected all segments of Egyptian society. The new era is one on which we embark together as a nation, full of hope, trusting in God, and determined to make Egypt prosper. I offer my sincere prayers and wishes for an orderly and peaceful transition of power and for crafting a constitution that suits and fulfills the aspiration and needs of the people and brings their efforts to fruition.

Shaykh Ali Gomaa is Grand Mufti of Egypt. One of the most respected jurists in the Sunni Muslim world, he heads the Dar al-Iftaa, which issues thousands of Islamic legal judgments per week.

<http://blogs.nd.edu/contendingmodernities/2011/03/01/a-new-egypt/>

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=107

Egypt's Grand Mufti responds to Fort Hood shootings

Source: *The Washington Post*

I was shocked as any sensible human being was when I learned about the senseless, appalling and cowardly act of violence in Fort Hood. This horrific attack is a complete violation of Islamic law and norms and the perpetrator is no way representative of the Muslim people or the religion of Islam. God upholds the sanctity of life as a universal principle. *"and do not kill one another, for God is indeed merciful unto you"* says the Quran in (4:29). Islam views murder as both a crime punishable by law in this world and as major sin punishable in the Afterlife as well. Prophet Mohammad said, *"The first cases to be decided among the people on the Day of Judgment will be those of blood-shed"*

The Islam that we were taught in our youth is a religion that calls for peace and mercy. The first prophetic saying that is taught to a student of Islam is *"Those who show mercy are shown mercy by the All-Merciful. Show mercy to those who are on earth and the One in the heavens will show mercy to you."* What we have learned about Islam has been taken from the clear, pristine, and scholarly understanding of the Qur'an, *"O people we have created you from a single male and female and divided you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another."* When God said *"to know one another"* He did not mean in order to kill one another. All religions have forbidden the killing of innocents. To kill an innocent human being is tantamount to killing the entire humanity.

Let me be clear by reiterating that Islam is utterly against extremism and terrorism but unless we understand the factors that provide a rationalization for terrorism and extremism we will never be able to eradicate this scourge. This must be understood in order to build a better future that can bring an end to this grave situation that is destroying the world. My heart, my thoughts, and my prayers go out to the families who lost their loved ones. We offer our deepest and sincerest condolences to the families of the victims and pray for a speedy recovery of the wounded. We demand the perpetrator to be brought to justice and stand the trial. However, it was unfortunate to see hasty responses and reactions which immediately jumped on Islam within minutes of the first news reports of the incident. Blaming an entire religion because of the acts of this not-well man is patently unfair and serves no purpose.

It is important for us at this time of great sadness to stand together and process this horrific incident in a way that is fair and reasonable. It is important that we do not demonize Muslims without cause not because it is good for Muslims, but because our future ability to coexist in peace depends on it.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=98

http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2009/11/egypts_grand_mufti_responds_to_fort_hood_shootings.html

The Meaning of Jihad in Islam

Source: *The Washington Post*

Within Islam the term jihad refers to a large category of meanings. Today, however, there are attempts to isolate this term to only one form of jihad to the exclusion of all others. This includes a conception of jihad that at best refers only to armed struggle, and at worst to a barbaric form of warfare that seeks to destroy whatever peace may still remain in the world. This could not be farther from the concept of jihad as understood by Muslims throughout history and the world over. For Muslims, jihad is much more than armed struggle against an enemy from the outside for it includes constant struggles within both

oneself and one's own society. When jihad actually does take the form of armed struggle, Muslims are aware that it can only be done for the sake of a just cause.

Once, upon returning from a battle, the Prophet Muhammad said to his companions, "*We have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad; the jihad of the soul.*" Here the term jihad refers to the spiritual exercise of opposing the lower self. This is referred to as the greater jihad since people spend their entire lives struggling against the base desires within them that can harm both themselves and those around them. Jihad is also used to refer to the pilgrimage to Mecca. When Aishah, the wife of the Prophet, was asked about the jihad of women, she said, "*Your jihad is to make the pilgrimage.*" Here the pilgrimage is the lesser jihad of women and the elderly who are not members of the armies that fight in defense of the country, so pilgrimage, which is a journey that is comprised of great difficulties due to the crowds and the physically demanding nature of its practices, is called jihad. The term jihad is also used to refer to speaking truth to those in power, so in Islam government oversight is a form of jihad.

In addition to these meanings, the term jihad refers to the defense of a nation or a just cause. This is what jihad was legislated for, and it must be differentiated from indiscriminate killing by the condition that it be "*in the way of God,*" meaning to struggle in self-defense, to alleviate tyranny, or to prevent aggression. These are the characteristics that differentiate jihad from killing, which is a crime. These characteristics that amount to "*in the way of God*" are summed up in the Quran, "*Fight in the way of God against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression – for, verily, God does not love aggressors,*"

[Quran, 2:190]. This verse summarizes everything that has been agreed upon concerning guidelines of warfare, including the first and second Geneva Conventions.

As for suicide bombing, Islam forbids suicide, it forbids the taking of one's own life. In addition, Islam forbids aggression against others. Attacking civilians, women, children, and the elderly by blowing oneself up is absolutely forbidden in Islam. No excuse can be made for the crimes committed in New York, Spain, and London, and anyone who tries to make excuses for these acts is ignorant of Islamic law (*shari'ah*), and their excuses are a result of extremism and ignorance.

Gender Equality in Islam

Islam adopts the perspective of gender equality, but it does not endorse the idea of gender equivalency. Islam affirms the difference between the natural dispositions and constitutions of men and women. Women have the ability to bear and nurse children, whereas men do not, so there is a lack of equivalency in regards to the physical and psychological make-up of men and women, but both enjoy rights and bear responsibilities, in which respect they are equal.

It is from this perspective that the Quran says, "*Do not covet the bounties which God has bestowed more abundantly on some of you than on others. Men shall have a benefit from what they earn, and women shall have a benefit from what they earn. Ask, therefore, God [to give you] out of His bounty,*" [Quran, 4:32] which is reaffirmed by the saying of the Prophet, "*God condemns those men who seek to be like women, and He condemns those women who strive to be like men.*" This is forbidden, and Muslims are enjoined to accept what has been allotted them by God; whether they are men or women they should be pleased with those particular masculine and feminine traits that God has bestowed upon them, and they should pray that God give them success in truly realizing them. The Quran says, "*And women have rights similar to those [of men] over them in kindness,*" [Quran, 2:228]. In this verse that speaks of rights and duties the Quran has affirmed equality. The verse continues and says, "*And men are a degree above them.*" This degree is clarified in another verse that discusses the issue of maintenance, which is a responsibility rather than an honor, "*Men shall take full care of women with the bounties which God has bestowed more abundantly on the former than on the latter, and with what they may spend out of their possessions,*" [Quran, 4:34].

Islam made it obligatory for men to support and care for women, similarly this is one of the rights that women can demand of men. While women are permitted to remain at home, men are obligated to seek a means of sustenance for them. Women are free to care for their children and take on the role of educator and nurturer of the life that originated inside of them. In this respect Islam affords women the highest status. When asked whom one should love and respect the most, the Prophet said, "*Your mother, then your mother, then your mother, then your father.*"

Islam says, "*Men and women are brother and sister,*" meaning, "*Women have rights similar to those [of men] over them in kindness.*" The status afforded men is one of responsibility, not honor. There is no prejudice in Islamic doctrine that prefers men over women. The Quran does not say it has preferred men over women, it says, "*Do not covet the bounties which God has bestowed more abundantly on some of you than on others.*" Some men may desire the praiseworthy characteristics of women, just like some men desire in women for the praiseworthy characteristics of men, but God forbade this desire. God gave preference to women over men in certain ways, but at the same time He gave preference to men over women others, each regarding particular traits He bestowed upon them. Everyone should be thankful for that which they have been given and strive to fulfill the potential of their unique characteristics. Men should be content with their masculinity, and women should be content with their femininity. There is a disparity between men and women, but there is no discrimination. Gender discrimination is something that came from outside of Islam, from pre-Islamic concepts that were passed down. This is a perspective that claims women are to blame for humanity's being dispelled from the Garden, but this is not the Quranic version of the story, the Quran states, "*Satan caused them both to stumble therein, and thus brought about the loss of their erstwhile state,*" [Quran, 2:36].

The non-Quranic perspective views women as the cause of sin, a seductress, and a devil, however Islam rejects this. The Quran speaks of, "*And the righteous women are the truly devout ones, who guard the intimacy which God has [ordained to be] guarded,*" [Quran, 4:34]. These are words that view women as human beings equal to men and sharing responsibilities side by side. This other perspective that was passed down by various peoples and religions has spilled over into the Islamic perspective.

But Islam, when unadulterated by social customs and inherited cultural traditions, views men and women equitably without recourse to bias or discrimination.

Freedom of Religion in Islam

The essential question before us is can a person who is Muslim choose a religion other than Islam? The answer is yes, they can, because the Quran says, "*Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion,*" [Quran, 109:6], and, "*Whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve,*" [Quran, 18:29], and, "*There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is distinct from error,*" [Quran, 2:256].

These verses from the Quran discuss a freedom that God affords all people. But from a religious perspective, the act of abandoning one's religion is a sin punishable by God on the Day of Judgment. If the case in question is one of merely rejecting faith, then there is no worldly punishment. If, however, the crime of undermining the foundations of the society is added to the sin of apostasy, then the case must be referred to a judicial system whose role is to protect the integrity of the society. Otherwise, the matter is left until the Day of Judgment, and it is not to be dealt with in the life of this world. It is an issue of conscience, and it is between the individual and God. In the life of this world, "*There is no compulsion in religion,*" in the life of this world, "*Unto you your religion and unto me my religion,*" and in the life of this world, "*He who wills believes and he who wills disbelieves,*" while bearing in mind that God will punish this sin on the Day of Judgment, unless it is combined with an attempt to undermine the stability of the society, in which case it is the society that holds them to account, not Islam. All religions have doctrinal points that define what it is to be an adherent of that religion.

These are divine injunctions that form the basis of every religion, but they are not a means for imposing a certain system of belief on others by force. According to Islam, it is not permitted for Muslims to reject their faith, so if a Muslim were to leave Islam and adopt another religion, they would thereby be committing a sin in the eyes of Islam. Religious belief and practice is a personal matter, and society only intervenes when that personal matter becomes public and threatens the well-being of its members.

In some cases, this sin of the individual may also represent a greater break with the commonly held values of a society in an attempt to undermine its foundations or even attack its citizenry. Depending on the circumstances, this may reach the level of a crime of sedition against one's society. Penalizing this sedition may be at odds with some conceptions of freedom that would go so far as to ensure people the freedom to destroy the society in which they live. This is a freedom that we do not allow since preservation of the society takes precedence over personal freedoms. This was the basis of the Islamic perspective on apostasy when committed at certain times and under certain circumstances.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=87

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2007/07/27/AR2007072701863.html>

Christians and Muslims condemn violence

Source: The Archbishop of Canterbury.org

ISLAMIC and Christian leaders and scholars condemned religious violence in a communiqué issued on Wednesday at Lambeth Palace, at the end of a three-day conference to mark the first anniversary of the Muslim letter “A Common Word”.

In a two-page text, 17 religious leaders and scholars from Europe and the Middle East say they are “deeply troubled” by the threats to the Christian community in Mosul, northern Iraq.

“We find no justification in Islam or Christianity for those promoting the insecurity or perpetuating the violence evident in parts of Iraq.”

The conference, entitled “A Common Word and Future Muslim-Christian Engagement”, built on the letter sent by Muslim scholars to Western and Eastern Church leaders last year. It proposed that the two faiths draw together on the basis of all that they had in common. In the communiqué, they also announce that in the coming year they will translate “significant texts” from each tradition to be used by the other; promote educational material that provided “a fair reflection of our faiths”; and link academic institutions together to work on shared values. During a press conference on Wednesday, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Dr Ali Gomaa, rejected press reports that he had praised suicide-bombers in Palestine. The reports were wrong and had “muddied the picture. . . We are against any persecution of any minorities,” he said.

If the two faiths worked together they could do more to help the poor. “We are not doing a good enough job,” he said through his interpreter. He hoped the “good character” of the two religions would prevent the crisis from proliferating. Dr Williams said that there were many examples of small-scale activities by both faiths, based on “a very clear religious ethic”.

Full text of the communiqué

We, the Christian and Muslim leaders and scholars gathered for the Conference on A Common Word and Future Muslim-Christian Engagement from 12 to 15 October 2008AD/1429AH, give thanks to Almighty God for the opportunity to meet together and grow in mutual understanding, trust and friendship. We wish to express our par-

ticular gratitude to the His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, for convening the conference in partnership with the Cambridge Inter-Faith Program and the Royal Aal Al-Bayt Foundation, and for hosting us at Lambeth Palace. We are grateful too for the extraordinarily generous hospitality offered by the Colleges and University of Cambridge. We are especially appreciative of Emmanuel College's hosting our opening lectures and dinner, Jesus College for offering facilities for our plenary and group discussions and providing meals, Clare College for dinner and fine music, as well as the great number of students and staff of the Colleges who never tired of offering cheerful assistance.

We are conscious that our meeting represented the most significant gathering of international Muslim leaders ever to take place in the United Kingdom, matched by a similarly wide diversity of traditions and geographical backgrounds amongst the Christian participants. We were greatly stimulated by the opening addresses to the conference by the Archbishop and His Excellency Dr Ali Gomaa, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, and the responses to their addresses by His Eminence Dr Mustafa Ceriā, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia Herzegovina and His Beatitude Gregorios III, Melkite Greek-Catholic Patriarch of Antioch & All the East, of Alexandria and of Jerusalem. We live in an increasingly global world that brings with it increased interdependence. The closer we are drawn together by this globalization and interdependence, the more urgent is the need to understand and respect one another in order to find a way out of our troubles.

Meeting at a time of great turbulence in the world financial system our hearts go out to the many people throughout the world whose lives and livelihood are affected by the current crisis. When a crisis of this magnitude occurs, we are all tempted to think solely of ourselves and our families and ignore the treatment of minorities and the less fortunate. In this conference we are celebrating the shared values of love of God and love of neighbor, the basis of A Common Word, whilst reflecting self-critically on how often we fall short of these standards. We believe that the divine commandment to love our neighbor should prompt all people to act with compassion towards others, to fulfill their duty of helping to alleviate misery and hardship. It is out of an understanding of shared values that we urge world leaders and our faithful everywhere to act together to ensure that the burden of this financial crisis, and also the global environmental crisis, does not fall

unevenly on the weak and the poor. We must seize the opportunity for implementing a more equitable global economic system that also respects our role as stewards of the earth's resources.

Our gathering was timed to coincide with the first anniversary of A Common Word between Us and You. We unanimously welcomed this letter from Muslim leaders and scholars and the Archbishop's letter A Common Word for the Common Good, noting both their historic, ground-breaking nature and the collegial processes from which they issued. The generous spirit that characterizes both letters allowed us, carefully and honestly, to begin exploring areas of potential agreement as well as some of the difficult issues which have sometimes become the focus for misunderstanding and hostility. We discussed our understanding of scripture, shared moral values, respect for foundational figures, religious freedom and religiously motivated violence.

As we were meeting together, we were deeply troubled to learn of the situation in Mosul (Iraq) where threats to the Christian community have further added to the tragic Iraqi refugee situation. These threats undermine the centuries-old tradition of local Muslims protecting and nourishing the Christian community, and must stop. We are profoundly conscious of the terrible suffering endured by Iraqi people of every creed in recent years and wish to express our solidarity with them. We find no justification in Islam or Christianity for those promoting the insecurity or perpetrating the violence evident in parts of Iraq. We call upon the religious, political and community leaders to do all in their power to promote the return of all persons and communities, including the ancient Christian communities, and ensure a stable environment in which all citizens can flourish.

We unequivocally declare that, in Iraq as anywhere else in the world, no person or community should be persecuted or threatened on account of their religious faith. We must all have a particular concern for religious minorities in our midst. We pray that Iraq may find peace and that our two religions may work together to overcome divisions in society, demonstrating faithfulness to the dual commandment to love God and love neighbor. One of the most moving elements of our encounter has been the opportunity to study together passages from our scriptures. We have felt ourselves to have been together before God and this has given us each a greater appreciation for the richness of the other's heritage as well as an awareness of the potential

value in being joined by Jewish believers in a journey of mutual discovery and attentiveness to the texts we hold sacred. We wish to repeat the experience of a shared study of scriptural texts as one of the ways in which we can come, concretely, to develop our understanding of how the other understands and lives their own faith. We commend this experience to others. Looking towards the future, mindful of the crucial importance of education and inspired by our presence in a great seat of learning, we have also been keen to identify specific ways in which our encounter might be broadened and deepened. We have, therefore, committed ourselves to the following over the coming year: To identify and promote the use of educational materials, for all age-groups and in the widest possible range of languages, that we accept as providing a fair reflection of our faiths.

To build a network of academic institutions, linking scholars, students and academic resources, with various committees and teams which can work on shared values. To identify funds to facilitate exchanges between those training for roles of leadership within our religious communities.

To translate significant texts from our two traditions for the use of the other As we prepare to return, each to our own countries and contexts, we resolve to act on the oft-repeated desire to find the means of ensuring that the two letters we have discussed and the wonderful fruits of our time together are spread amongst our co-religionists; that the spirit of collaboration, mutual respect and desire for greater understanding may be the mark of our relationship for the benefit of all humankind.

To God be the glory for that which has been achieved in these days together, and may God guide us in the right path as we carry forward the work begun.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=57

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1036/communique-from-a-common-word-conference>

The Wise Mufti

Source: *The Times.co.uk*

There was nothing inaccurate about Tony Blair's remarks to a conference on Islam yesterday. Nor was there much that was new; he has extolled the virtues and diversity of moderate British Muslims many times before. The contribution that deserved to be singled out for its courage and clarity came, instead, from Dr Ali Gomaa, the Grand Mufti of Egypt. His subject was Islamic law and governance, in which he is one of the world's foremost experts, and his message was simple: ill-trained Islamic "scholars" who take it upon themselves to issue fatwas, or religious edicts, with little understanding of the contemporary world have no authority to do so. And extremists declaiming in mosques and via the internet that the only legitimate Islamic form of government is a restored "Caliphate", such as that which stretched from Fez to Samarkand 500 years ago, are simply wrong.

It is extraordinary that such basic truths needed restating in Britain two years after the July 7 bombings. Yet they did, in large part because so few in Dr Gomaa's audience of fellow moderate Muslims have been as forthright, or as brave. "The best lack all conviction," as Yeats wrote, "while the worst are full of passionate intensity." This is as true, and as critically topical, as when the poet wrote it of his native Ireland in 1920. This week's conference, hosted by the University of Cambridge, has been criticized for supposedly excluding critics of Mr Blair's foreign policy, among them Lord Ahmed. But it and similar events have a crucial role in the long struggle against extremism and extremists, who seek to silence the moderate voices through intimidation. Those voices must now follow Dr Gomaa's lead, and use the podium to denounce the radicals who have cowed so many of them. There was some truth in Mr Blair's remarks yesterday that the media give disproportionate time and space to extremists' goadings – but Britain's moderates have hardly distinguished themselves in articulating their convictions for mainstream consumption, nor in seizing the microphone to express them.

The second purpose of this conference has been to debate the central question of how to neutralize religious extremism. Dr Gomaa picked the right target, aiming carefully at British-based imams preaching a hateful distortion of Islam that is rooted more in medievalist fantasy than the Koran. The Government, in basing policy on

the Siddiqui report on the teaching of Islam in universities, risks pursuing the wrong culprit. Universities clearly cannot be allowed to become hotbeds of extremism – but there is little evidence that this is a real danger, and a real risk that meddling in academic coursework in the supposed interest of national security could backfire. When Bill Rammell, the Higher Education Minister, called for “the effective and accurate delivery of Islamic studies in our universities”, he might as well have been quoting Orwell. When moderates preach moderation to more moderates, little is accomplished unless they go home and turn their words into action.

Imitating Dr Gomaa’s style as well as his substance would be a good start. There is a strong case for British Muslims to appoint their own mufti to embody the “authentic, contemporary, tolerant Islam” that he and they hold dear.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=53

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/public/sitesearch.do?querystring=The+Wise+Mufti&p=tto&pf=all&bl=on>

Terrorism Has No Religion

Source: Ali-gomaa.com

Terrorism cannot be born of religion. Terrorism is the product of corrupt minds, hardened hearts, and arrogant egos, and corruption, destruction, and arrogance are unknown to the heart attached to the divine.

Islam is a religion of tolerance and peaceful coexistence with all of humanity both as individuals and communities. Islam views people as honored creatures without regard for their religion, race, or color. God Most High says, Verily We have honored the Children of Adam. We carry them on the land and the sea, and have made provision of good things for them, and have preferred them above many of those whom We have created with a marked preferment [17:70]. Islam has come up with a code for relations between Muslims and non-Muslims living in the same society: God forbids you not those who warred not against you on account of religion and drove you not out from your homes, that you should show them kindness and deal justly with them. Lo! God loves the just dealers [60:8]. God commands us in this verse to act well towards non-Muslims and not harm them saying, "*show them kindness (tabirruhum)*," for kindness (birr) is all that is good. It is as if God is commanding us, and making it preferable that we cooperate with non-Muslims in all avenues of good.

All who truly know Islam are aware of its concern for global peace, since it made it one of its main pillars. Peace (al-Salam) is one of the names of God Most High and it is among His attributes, He said, He is God, than Whom there is no other God, the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, Peace, the Keeper of Faith, the Guardian, the Majestic, the Compeller, the Superb. Glorified be God from all that they ascribe as partner (unto Him) [59:23]. He made peace His greeting to His servants and enjoined them to make it their greeting as well; they exchange it whenever they meet, it is their distinguishing mark in the mosque, school, factory, and marketplace. Paradise is named the Abode of Peace: He said, For them is the Abode of Peace with their Lord. He will be their Protecting Friend because of what they used to do [6:127]; and the other verses in which "peace" is mentioned are numerous. Peace has been the distinguishing mark of Muslims in the East and the West from the advent of Islam to this day. It is the greeting that they give other Muslims when they meet each other and when they depart from

each other saying, "*Peace be upon you.*" This peace and security is not limited just to Muslims. Muslims believe that all men, regardless of their faith, always possess the right to live in peace and security in Muslim lands. Protecting others from oppression within one's borders is something that Islam makes mandatory emphasizing this and forbidding Muslims to harm or have animosity against those under their protection either by word or deed. God Most High does not love or guide oppressors; He gives them their punishment ahead of time in the world, or leaves them to be punished doubly in the afterlife.

The Quranic verses and Prophetic Tradition that mention the impermissibility, grossness, and the evil effects of oppression are many. Prophetic Traditions have been related specifically warning against oppressing non-Muslims who are under the protection of Muslims or possess treaties with them. The Prophet said, "*Whoever wrongs someone with whom the Muslims have a treaty, denies them their rights, burdens them beyond their capacity, or takes something from them without their good will, I am that person's adversary on the Day of Judgment.*"¹

Islam encourages peace and security due to the extremely important effect they have on making life stable for humanity and making advancement possible in all fields. In order to comprehend the extent of the effect of peace and security on the advancement of peoples, we need to take a look at the destructive effects of war on peoples, advancement, and development, for as the saying goes, "*The good of something is revealed by its opposites.*" Since the basic components of community development and advancement are the physical well-being of the individuals of the society so that they can fulfill their roles, we find that wars and economic sanctions have a devastating effect on the health and well-being of a community.

Tolerance for adherents of other religions by people whose entire lives are based on a religion by which they have been granted victory and predominance, is something that was previously unknown in the history of religions. This is something to which Westerners themselves bear witness. The knowledgeable French scholar Gustav Le Bon said, "*We have seen from the Quranic verses mentioned previously that Muhammad's magnanimity towards Jews and Christians was most great; something which was not said by the establishers of the religions that predated him like Judaism and Christianity in particular. And we shall see how his deputies followed him in this.*"

It is both false and unjust to think that Islam is the cause of terrorism just because it is carried out by groups who associate themselves with Islam; otherwise this claim would be call for the destruction of all religions. For example, we know that Christianity calls for love, and that its followers were oppressed at a time when they were weak, but should we consider that the repression and torture of Muslims and Jews which was carried out by the Church in Spain was the result of the teachings of Christianity? The Church took out its anger on the Jews and Muslims due to the spread of the philosophy and thought of Ibn Rushd, especially among the Jews, and ruled that all Jews who did not allow themselves to be baptized were to be expelled from the country. They were allowed to sell their property if they wished, but they were not permitted to take any gold or silver with them when they left, so they were forced to accept trade-goods in return for their property. The Jews left Spain leaving their properties behind them in order to escape with their lives, although many were overcome by hunger and the hardship of travel due to their poverty.

The Church also ruled in 1052 CE for the expulsion of all Muslims from Spain and its outlying lands if they did not submit to being baptized. The condition imposed upon them was that they not take a road leading to Muslim lands upon their departure, and whoever went against this order was killed. We are also loath to blame the Crusades on the teachings of Christianity, and we attempt to differentiate between them and the practices of certain Christian extremists and terrorists. The twentieth century, with all of its revolutionary experiments, including all of the barbarism of the communist and Nazi revolutions, falls short in the face of the atrocities of the Crusades against other Christians; some of them would spread their dead defec-tors out on the ground as a means of fertilization! Viedham mentions that these wars were full of atrocities because the theologians were always ready to pour oil on the fire and revive the soldier's brutality when they were overcome with doubts and weakness.

The soldiers may have been brutal, but there were times when they inclined towards mercy; as for the theologians, they considered moderation and mercy a form of treason. Sheikh Muhammad Abduh says concerning the Inquisition, "*The cruelty of the Inquisition was such that people of that time said it was nearly impossible to be a Christian and die at home in one's bed.*" He also says, "*Between the years 1481 and 1808 C.E. the courts of the Inquisition judged 340,000 people, 200,000 of whom were*

burned alive." Much closer to us today are the number Afghan villages that were completely destroyed in order to punish one person, and the fires are still burning in Baghdad in order to punish one person because he possesses weapons of mass destruction, which have no existence outside of intentional lies. Similarly the clear and unabashed terrorism practiced by the Zionist entity cannot be blamed on the teachings of Judaism, for all religions came as a mercy to people and a means of spreading justice and forgiveness among them.

This does not mean that we deny the acts of destruction and terror which occur in our secure countries, but they are the result of perverse minds, desolate hearts, and arrogance. Allah says, Behaving arrogantly in the land and plotting evil; and the evil plot only encloses the men who make it [35:43]. In fact the words of God nearly apply directly to them when He says, And of mankind there is he whose conversation of the life of this world please you (Muhammad), and he calls God to witness as to that which is in his heart; yet he is the most rigid of opponents. And when he turns away (from you) his effort in the land is to make mischief therein and to destroy the crops and the cattle; and God does not love mischief. And when it is said to him: Be careful of their duty to God, pride takes him to sin. Hell will settle his account, an evil resting-place [2:204-206].

We ask God to inspire us with guidance and to give peace to our children, our countries, and the entire Muslim community.

And God is Most High and Knows Best.

http://www.ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=32

Jihad: Myths and Facts (Fatwa)

Source: www.ali-gomaa.com

The concept of Jihad in Islam is one of the topics that causes the most confusion and is surrounded by a loud cacophony aiming at equating Jihad with mass murder and random shooting sprees. All concepts have roots in a group of beliefs that nourish the concept into full bloom. By applying this definition on Jihad, we would find that its roots are not the same as what infamous propaganda would have us believe; that Islam instills bloodlust and a desire to terrorize people and massacre them in cold blood or convert them at the point of a sword.

The Relationship Between Jihad and Islam

The roots of Jihad are in Islam and to understand the concept of Jihad we need to take a broader look at the message of Islam and the messenger who carried it from heaven to earth. Muslims consider the Prophet Muhammad to be the carrier of the last revelation from God to all mankind. This idea gives rise to the universality of Islam which does not confine itself to a certain place or limit itself to a specific time and more importantly does not target a particular race or ethnicity; be it Arab or Turk or Anglo Saxon or Asian. The reality is that Islam transcends the boundaries of space, time and race to encompass all of humanity in its fold. The most important characteristic of the Prophet Muhammad, which is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, is that he is a "mercy" to the worlds. The idea that the Prophet Muhammad was sent by God to be a mercy to the worlds reinforces the universal characteristic of the message of Islam as the Prophet is not a mercy to Muslims alone but to all people, animals, plants, stones, indeed to all creatures; this is what is meant by "all the worlds". This overarching characteristic of the Prophet being a mercy to all the worlds encompasses all the concepts and / or the ideologies which is stem from Islam and are promoted by it, including the concept of Jihad.

The Linguistic Origin of Jihad

Before delving deeply into the concept of Jihad, it is vital to define the term Jihad and its root in the Arabic language. The word Jihad comes from the root j / h / d, which in Arabic means to exert the most effort. This definition is general as one can exert effort in studying or

fulfilling goals and ambitions in a variety of areas. In Islam the idea of exerting effort has two levels, a major level and a minor one. The major level of Jihad is jihad al-nafs or struggling against one's lower self and its demeaning lustful desires. This Jihad is the hardest because it needs discipline and hard work. The lesser, or minor Jihad, is al-qitaal or armed struggle. This is the Jihad that has been attacked by unjust and misleading propaganda in an effort to equate it with mere bloodshed.

Qur'anic Verses and Prophetic Traditions on Jihad

Keeping in mind the concept that "mercy" is the backbone and root of all Islamic legislations and rulings, one must understand that Jihad is no different. God in the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad in his prophetic traditions have laid out the purpose of Jihad and set the rulings and foundational bases which condition this concept and through which it can be defined as Jihad. God says in the Holy Qur'an: We ordained for the children of Israel that if any one kills a person-unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land- it would be as if he killed the whole people, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all people. [5: 32]

The Quran forbids murder whilst extolling the sanctity of human life, "*life, which Allah has made sacred*" [6: 151]

God also says in the Holy Qur'an: Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress limits; For Allah loveth not transgressors. [2: 190]

In his commentary, Imam al-Taher Ibn 'Ashur reported through Ibn 'Abbas and 'Umar Ibn 'Abdul 'Aziz and Mujahid that this verse is definite and has not been abrogated. He went on to say: "*the purport is to fight those who are set to fight you, i.e. do not attack the old, women or children.*" Suleiman Ibn Burayda narrated through his father that whenever the Prophet used to send an army to battle, he would brief its commander and remind him to fear Allah in his actions and those with him and say: "*Fight in the name of Allah, fight those (who fight you) from among the disbelievers and do not exceed your limits, do not transgress, deceive, mutilate [the dead] and do not kill a child.*" [Al-Tirmidhi]. Ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with them both) said: "*I saw the messenger of Allah (pbuh) circling the Ka'ba saying: 'How great and sacred you are,*

and how pleasant your fragrance! By He in whose hand is the life of Mohammed, the sanctity of a believer, his property, life and to think well of him is greater in the sight of Allah than yours.’’ [Ibn Majah]. Consider also: “The first cases to be adjudicated against on the Day of Judgment will be those of bloodshed.” (Bukhari), and his strikingly stark threat that: “Whoever kills one (non-Muslim) under contract (of Muslim protection) will never smell the scent of Paradise.” (Ibn Majah).

The Purpose of Jihad in Islam The purpose or the aim of Jihad or conducting wars for the sake of God is as follows:

- Self defense and fighting back against aggression.
- Alleviating religious persecution and establishing freedom of religion so that people may have the opportunity to think freely and practice their religious convictions.

The Conditions and the Rulings for Jihad

- The nobility of purpose, meaning that no personal interests or private gains should be the aim behind which Jihad is being waged.
- Fighting should be only against warriors not defenceless civilians who are not in the battlefield and are not equipped or trained to be engaged in combat.
- The killing or harming of women and children is strictly prohibited. Al-Bukhari and Muslim reported through Abdullah ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with them both) that a woman was found dead in one of the battles fought by the Prophet (pbuh); thereupon he condemned killing women and children. Another phrasing of the hadith states:
“The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) forbade killing women and children.” Imam al-Nawawi said: “There is a scholarly consensus on putting this hadith in practice as long as the women and children do not fight [the Muslims]. If they do, the majority of scholars maintain that they should be killed.”
[Sharh Muslim 12/48].
- Preserving the lives of captives and treating them humanely.

- Preserving the environment which includes the prohibition on killing animals or cutting trees or destroying harvest or polluting rivers or wells or demolishing houses.
- Preserving religious freedom for worshippers in their homes, churches or synagogues.
- Killing and attacking people by surprise is prohibited. Abu Huraira (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "*A believer is not to kill [others]. Faith is a deterrent to killing.*" Ibn al-Athir said: "*Killing [here] means taking others by surprise and killing them while they are unprepared.*" [Al-Nihaya fi Gharib al-Hadith wa al-Athar 3/775]. The hadith means that faith is a deterrent to attacking others suddenly while they are unprepared. The Prophet's words: "*A believer is not to attack [others] by surprise*" is a clear prohibition against deception in combat.
- Permission to enter a country is considered a non-verbal security agreement not to cause corruption in the host country. Imam al-Khurqī said in his Mukhtasr: "*Whoever enters enemy lands in safety is not allowed to cheat them of their money.*" Commenting on this statement, Ibn Qudama said that it is prohibited to betray them [non-Muslims in non-Muslim countries] because there is an unspoken covenant to enter in safety on the condition that the person who seeks permission to enter a foreign country does not betray or oppress them. So whoever enters our lands in safety and betrays us violates this security agreement. This is prohibited because it involves treachery which is forbidden in our religion." [Al-Mughni 9/237].
- The enemy must be from among those whom Muslims are permitted to fight as compared to the enemy with whom Muslims have a truce. It is impermissible to attack the enemy under the cover of night because it is a violation of the security pact between them in terms of lives, wealth, and honor.
- It is impermissible to use human shields save in a state of war and under specific conditions detailed by jurists. [Bahr Ra`iq 80\5, Hashiyat ibn 'Abn Abdin 223\3, Rawdat al Talibin 239\10, Mughni al Muhtaj 223\4, Mughni ibn Qudama 449\8, 386\10].

Who Has The Right To Call For Jihad and Declare War?

1- The principle in war is that it should be launched with the authorization of, and under the banner of, the Muslim ruler; it is imperative that the decision to declare war be based on his own reasoning and his subjects must obey him. A ruler is authorized to declare war due to his knowledge of evident and hidden matters, the consequences of actions and the interest of his people. For this reason, a ruler is authorized to declare war and agree to domestic or international treaties as soon as he assumes office. In turn, he does not issue decisions based on [personal] whims.

The Muslim ruler declares war only after consulting specialists in every relevant field such as technical and military specialists and political consultants who are indispensable to military strategy. The luminary al-Bahutī said in Sharh Muntahā al-Iradāt: "*It is prohibited to [launch an] attack without the ruler's permission because he is responsible for making the decision of declaring war. [This is because] he has access to all the information pertaining to the enemy. [His permission is mandatory] except if [Muslims] are taken by surprise by non-Muslim enemies and fear their threat. [Only] then is it permissible to fight the attackers without the ruler's permission because of the general benefit therein.*"

1 - Breach of international agreements and treaties: Islamic states must abide by the agreements and treaties that they have acknowledged and entered into of their own accord; standing firmly with the international community towards achieving global peace and security [only] to the extent of the commitment of the signatory countries. Allah says: O you who believe, fulfill [all] contracts [5:1]

In the above verse, the term 'contract' refers to all commitments between two parties on a particular issue. In his interpretation of the above verse, the erudite Tunisian scholar, ibn 'Ashur says: "*'Contracts' in this verse refers to one of a genus denoting the totality [of contracts]. It includes covenants that Muslims made with their Lord such as to follow the shari'ah ... pacts of allegiance between the believers and the prophet [pbuh], not to associate partners with Allah, steal, or commit fornication ... agreements between Muslims and non-Muslims ... and agreements between one Muslim and another*" [Al-Tahriir wa al-Tanwīr, 6/74]. Amr ibn Awf al-Muzna, may Allah be pleased with him, narrates that the prophet [pbuh] said: "*Muslims are bound by the conditions [they stipulate] except*

those that are unlawful or those that make unlawful matters lawful.” [reported by al-Tirmidhi]. Commenting on this hadith, al-Jass said: “*It is a general obligation to fulfill all the conditions man holds himself to as long as there is nothing (in Islamic law) to restrict them.*” [Ahkam al-Qurān, 2/418].

Ali, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated that the Prophet [pbuh] said: “*The protection granted by the weakest Muslim to a non-Muslim is tantamount to that of the entire [community]. Whosoever violates it incurs the curse of Allah, the angels, and all the people.*” [Reported by al-Bukhari].

Abdullah ibn Umar, may Allah be pleased with them both, narrated that the Prophet [pbuh] said: “*The signs of hypocrisy are four: when he is entrusted with something he betrays the trust, when he speaks he lies, when he makes a promise he breaks it, when he quarrels he behaves in an immoral manner. Whoever possesses all four is a hypocrite and whoever possesses one of them possesses an element of hypocrisy until he gives it up.*” [Reported by al-Bukhari in his Sahih].

Umar ibn al-Hamq al-Khazaīnī narrated that the Prophet [pbuh] said: “*If a man entrusts another with his life and is killed by him, I have nothing to do with the murderer, even if the murdered man were a non-Muslim.*” [Reported by al-Bayhaqi]. Consequently, the parties to international treaties and agreements are committed to end war and enjoy a state of peace by virtue of the agreement they entered into. Allah Almighty says: And if they incline towards peace, then incline to it [also] and rely upon Allah. Indeed, it is He who is the Hearing, the Knowing. [8:61].

Free Choice Vs. Coerced Conversion

The concept of “free choice” is central in the teachings of Islam as God stated in the Qur'an that “there is no coercion in religion”. Muslims grasped this concept well and realized that God does not want the mere submission of bodies but the real surrender of hearts. The heart is the main target of God's Message because mercy is the all encompassing nature of Islam and the heart is where it resides. In contemplating these stipulations we would find that none of the current incidents of terrorism which happen to involve Muslims claiming to be performing Jihad are actually Jihad because they fail to meet any of

the above laid out conditions. The sole aim of stipulating these conditions is to ensure that the concept of mercy and justice are at the forefront of the Muslims' hearts and minds while conducting warfare.

The aim of Jihad is not to steal people's property or to shed their blood or to alter their values and force them to convert. The aim is to free people from persecution so they may have the opportunity to think freely and choose their religion based on informed decisions. All of these terrorist attacks have probably one thing in common: the cowardice of the perpetrators who betray and target civilians and cause nothing but the bloodshed of innocents; Muslim and non-Muslim.

What breaks the heart the most is that while Jihad in Islam teaches Muslims to be noble knights who defend the rights of the weak and fight back against transgressors who are warriors in combat, today we find the people who claim that they are performing Jihad and attach themselves to this noble concept are those who are the furthest from Islam and Jihad in letter and spirit. The true noble knight Jihadist is the one who lays the foundation of justice and freedom for all people regardless of their personal religious convictions. Therefore, the concept of Jihad being a legitimate war is a true and well-defined one even by our modern definitions of just wars according to the United Nation's charter on wars. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was the role model who applied the different concepts of mercy, justice and freedom laid down in the Qur'an. He showed Muslims how to conduct and abide by these concepts practically.

The Prophet Muhammad and Jihad

Before delving directly into the Prophet's conquests and contemplating the way it which they were conducted and the aims that they strived to reach, we need to take a broader look at the concept of war in ancient times and how it is a social phenomenon that is as old as humanity itself. It is innate in human beings to preserve their lives and fend off death. The survival instinct causes human beings to defend what belongs to them even if this leads to struggle and combat in order to survive. This primitive level of fighting for the basic needs of life such as food or shelter can become more sophisticated and develop into a higher level of war, such as the wars that are waged for gaining freedom or restoring dignity or fighting oppression. Moving to the holy books and divine scriptures, namely the Torah and the Bible,

we find that new reasons are being added to wage war; reasons that are more advanced in nature and more civilizational in purpose. These types of wars are not waged to secure food for the next day, they are waged with the aim of alleviating injustice and securing freedom of worship for all people and helping those who are helpless and destitute. Humanity has witnessed a shift in the paradigm of conducting wars, they now aim to move away from fulfilling the needs of the "self" towards fulfilling "divine ideals" for which people are ready to sacrifice their lives.

This shift in paradigm of conducting wars continued in the tradition of Islam and took the name of "Jihad". In Jihad one finds himself or herself more than ready to sacrifice his life for his religious beliefs and for fulfilling a higher calling that advocates alleviating injustice and persecution and establishing freedom of religion and thought. When the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) immigrated to Madinah and established the nascent Muslim state after suffering 13 years of violent opposition and anguish, the tribe of Quraysh in Makkah was angry at the huge success that the message of Islam had achieved without coercion or bloodshed. The tribe of Quraysh felt threatened by the new power of Islam which would undermine their authority in Makkah where idol worship was the center of religious life and where Quraysh were the religious leaders whom people from the rest of Arabia would come to visit and present their offerings.

Muslims patiently endured persecution for 13 years in Makkah and abided by the Prophet's command to not respond to the aggression which they endured at the hands of the Makkan idolaters. When the Muslims immigrated to Madinah and established their new state, they found themselves in a position where they had to defend the boundaries of their nascent state against the attacks of Quraysh which hoped to destroy this new religion in its infancy. It was at this time that God permitted Muslims to fight back those who fight them and to protect themselves against aggression. This indicates that jihad in the sense of armed struggle was not a self- embedded concept which originated with Islam. It is more likely that the circumstances which the nascent Islamic state was born into gave rise to Jihad. These same circumstances surrounded the message of the Prophet Jesus who called the Jews to peace and reform yet they hunted him down and wanted to crucify him except that God saved his Prophet from his persecutors. Jihad Vs. Terrorism Terrorism, therefore, cannot be the outcome of any proper

understanding of religion. It is, rather, a manifestation of the immorality of people with cruel hearts, arrogant souls, and warped logic. Islam by its nature is a religion of moderation, not of extremes. In his famous saying, the Prophet of Islam advised Muslims to always choose the middle ground and not seek extremes on either side. This moderation in religion means that one neither exaggerates; transgressing the limits set by God, nor neglects them altogether, thereby falling short of His expectations. While calling upon all Muslims to exercise moderation with all permissible things, Islam clearly and categorically rejects all forms of extremism, including ghuluww (excessiveness), tanatu' (zealotry) and tashaddud (extreme practices). These forms of extremism do not find a home in Islamic teachings, because Islam recognizes that extremism is morally flawed and unproductive. It is against human nature, and has always been a short-lived phenomenon which does not work.

The problem faced by Muslims today – and indeed religious communities across the globe – relates to the issue of authority. In both Islam and other religions we are witnessing a phenomenon in which laypeople without a sound foundation in religious learning have attempted to set themselves up as religious authorities, even though they lack the scholarly qualifications for making valid interpretations of religious law and morality. In many cases, they have been facilitated in this by the proliferation of new media and irresponsibly sensationalistic journalism. It is this eccentric and rebellious attitude towards religion that clears the way for extremist interpretations of Islam that have no basis in reality. None of these extremists have been educated in Islam in genuine centers of Islamic learning.

They are, rather, products of troubled environments and have subscribed to distorted and misguided interpretations of Islam that have no basis in traditional Islamic doctrine. Their aim is purely political – to create havoc and chaos in the world. Unfortunately, terrorists often invoke the Islamic concept of "Jihad" to justify their crimes. This has led to much confusion and the tendency to misinterpret this important Islamic idea by linking it to violence and aggression. Military Jihad, by contrast, is the antithesis of terrorism. It is a just war of the sort that can be found in every religious law and civil code. As the Qur'an says, "*Fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but avoid aggression for God does not like the aggressor.*" "*But if they cease [fighting], then God is Forgiving, Merciful.*" This statement has been repeated many

times throughout the second chapter of the Qur'an and forms the fundamental parameters for the Islamic law of warfare: namely, that it is permissible only for the purpose of repelling an attack, and protecting one's self, one's home and one's family. Terrorism does not come close to fulfilling any of the many conditions which are necessary for a just Jihad. Among these is the fact that war can only be launched upon the authorization of the Muslim ruler, after consultation with specialists and consultants. Vigilantism has been clearly forbidden throughout Muslim history. Similarly, terrorism involves killing people and taking them by surprise. The Prophet has instructed: "*A believer is not to kill [others]. Faith is a deterrent to killing.*" Similarly, he has said: "*A believer is not to attack [others] by surprise.*" Clearly, terrorists can only accomplish their goals by going against these Islamic teachings, which are fundamental to the type of chivalrous character Muslims must always exhibit, whether at wartime or during periods of peace.

Moreover, terrorism kills and harms women and children. A tradition of the Prophet relates that a woman was found dead in one of the battles. The Prophet found out about this, and thereupon forbade the killing of women and children. Another phrasing of this hadith states: "*The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) forbade killing women and children.*" The great scholar of Islam, Imam al-Nawawi commented on this: "*There is a scholarly consensus on acting on this tradition as long as the women and children do not fight.*" It is clear once more that this is counter to the practice of terrorists. As such, it is clearly a mistake to label the terrorists practitioners of Jihad, or mujahidin. This is a lofty Islamic concept which bears no resemblance to the lawlessness practiced by terrorists.

The word commonly used in modern Arabic for terrorism, irhab, though an improvement, also poses its own set of problems. Indeed, irhab and the related Arabic root (r / h / b) often contain positive resonances for those conversant with classical Islamic vocabulary. For example, the Qur'an uses a word in the semantic range spawned by (r / h / b) to explain the proper awe with which humans ought to relate to God. "*O Children of Israel, remember my favor wherewith I favored you; and fulfill my covenant and I shall fulfill your covenant, and have awe of Me.*" [2:40]. Similarly, the Qur'an uses a related word (rahban) to refer to monks and monasticism (rahbaniyya), and their manner of interacting with the Divine. Finally, and more concretely, the root (r / h / b) is used to refer to a praiseworthy deterrence against those enemies who would seek to aggressively intimidate the Muslim community.

"Make ready for them whatever force you can and of horses tethered that you may thereby awe the enemy of God and your enemy." [8:60]. This term therefore is often used to refer to a concept of deterrence aimed at securing an advantage that will lead to peace with an enemy that would otherwise transgress against the Muslim community. The term irjaf as the proper translation into Arabic for terrorism is more favored. *"This word, which denotes subversion and scaremongering to bring quaking and commotion to society is derived from the root (r / j / f), which means to quake, tremble, be in violent motion, convulse, or shake."* This term occurs in the Qur'an in this context in one telling verse: *"Now; if the hypocrites do not give over, and those in whose hearts there is sickness and they make commotion (murjifun) in the city, We shall assuredly urge thee against them."* [33:60]. In the context of this verse, al-Qurtubi, the renowned thirteenth-century Qur'anic commentator and Malikiijurist, explains the meaning of irjaf with respect to "shaking of the hearts (tahrik al-qulub)," noting the root's corresponding application to "the shaking of the earth (rajafat al-ard)." Within an Islamic context, connecting this metaphor of creating commotion on earth (murjifun) with that of shaking hearts (tahrik al-qulub) connotes that those who do wrong are in fact acting against the wishes of the Divine.

The term murjifun (singular, murjif), as well as the equivalent rendering irjafiyyun (singular, irjafi), is a far better translation of terrorists ... Of course, there are multiple ways to bring about such intense commotion to society, but all of these fall under the term Irjaf. From a linguistic perspective, the term unambiguously connotes the cowardice, deceit, and betrayal associated with terrorism in striking from behind.

http://www.ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=135

Response to Raymond Ibrahim's Attack on Sheikh Ali Gomaa

by Sheila Musaji

Source: the AmericanMuslim.org

This week, Raymond Ibrahim wrote an article Top Egyptian Muslim Declares All Christians ‘Infidels’. In this article he attempted to “prove that” Sh. Ali Gomaa, a professor at Al Azhar university and the Grand Mufti of Egypt used the word kuffar referring to Christians in a speech and this term means (according to Ibrahim) “infidel” and is “a word that connotes “enemies,” “evil-doers,” and every bad thing to Muslim ears”. This was of course picked up by the Islamophobic blogsphere (Middle East Forum, Sheikh Yer’Mami, Front Page Magazine, Free Republic, Act for America, Jihad Watch, etc.). In the article, Ibrahim links to a video of Sh. Ali Gomaa’s speech, but the video is entirely in Arabic with no translation. The article was, as are all of Ibrahim’s articles, extremely negative and put the worst possible connotation, and drew the worst possible connections about this word.

Raymond Ibrahim and the Middle East Forum are part of what I would consider to be an Islamophobia network. He has, in the past made some pretty disreputable and biased statements, for example if Prophet Muhammad were alive today, he would do what Bin Laden is doing now. TAM has an article about his history of Islam bashing here and similar articles on other Islamophobes here

At one point Ibrahim was a research librarian at the Library of Congress, but he resigned from that position under curious circumstances after a Muslim wrote an oped countering many of Ibrahim’s statements. Loonwatch pointed out at that time that ... After this piece (by Salaam Abdul Khaliq) was published, Raymond revealed that he faced heat from his employers eventually leading to his “resignation”: ... after this Islamist op-ed was published, I received much heat from my supervisors at the Library of Congress, partially culminating in my recent resignation from that American bibliotech — another institution that goes out of its way to appease, especially where Saudi money and princes are concerned. It was good to see the Library of Congress take a stand against rabid anti-Muslims like Raymond Ibrahim. Notice also how he does what Islamophobes do best, resort to conspiracy theories and blaming it on those “influential” Saudis. No,

Raymond those who employed you at the Library of Congress weren't "appeasers" or "dhmmis" beholden to the world wide influence of the Saudis, they just got fed up with your hate. Kudos to them. All of this meant that I was extremely suspicious about his translation of and interpretation of Ali Gomaa's speech. Many other American Muslims were also wondering about exactly what was said and in what context, and numerous email group discussions took place. I am not fluent in Arabic, and the same is true of many American Muslims. Prof. Faroque Ahmad Khan took it on himself to investigate. Dr. Khan requested Dr Ibrahim Negm—senior advisor to the Grand Mufti to provide a clarification of the remarks attributed to Sheikh Ali Gomaa.

Here is the response that was received:

It is no exaggeration to say that the need for people from different religious backgrounds, countries, and cultures to live together in peace and harmony is the need of our time. The world has seen far too much violence and hatred over the past few years, and it has long been part of my mission as Mufti of Egypt to participate in initiatives which stress dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect between all communities. Despite all efforts, however, it unfortunately remains the case that we are living in difficult times when the words of Muslim leaders are regularly twisted and taken out of context so as to serve the political agendas and interests of writers whose sole purpose it is to put Islam and Muslims on the defensive, and to convince well-meaning citizens of the world that each and every Muslim is suspect, and so must be feared or censured. This recent uptick in Islamophobia has been monitored and written about by a number of credible observers. Some of these attempts are so intellectually dishonest that they hardly merit a response, except out of concern that the silence on the part of the victims of such smear campaigns is taken as evidence of their guilt.

In an entirely speculative and unsubstantiated article, Raymond Ibrahim absurdly tries to link my commentary on Muslim theological doctrine, delivered within the context of a mosque study circle, to the regrettable Maspero events in Cairo last month. My comments at the mosque that day were intended exclusively as a pedagogical explanation of the Qur'anic view on the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, and as Ibrahim himself acknowledges, I explicitly said that this theoretical positioning has no effect on the duty of Muslims to live in peace and harmony with their co-citizens, the Copts of Egypt. Rather, Muslims

are obligated to live in accordance with their fellow Christian citizens, and always strive towards the upholding of safety, security, and prosperity for all. Moreover, this is a long-standing position of mine, which I have reiterated on numerous occasions. Most recently, when churches were being targeted in Egypt, I took a clear stance on the impermissibility of such transgressions, saying that they violate the bond of citizenship in which all Egyptians participate. As co-participants in society, Egyptian citizens are all entitled to live together amongst each other, and conduct their daily affairs in peace, safety and security. Therefore, harming them or intimidating them – to say nothing of spilling their blood or destroying their houses of worship – is a stark violation of that trust. The Qur'an is clear that Muslims must honor their commitments. The Prophet has remarked that infidelity to one's commitments is a sign of hypocrisy, and that one who reneges on a commitment and kills someone under his trust will be branded a traitor on the Day of Judgment, undeserving of any association with the Prophet whatsoever. This offence is so serious because it goes against the most fundamental objectives of the Shari'a, its very *raison d'être*: the preservation of life, religion, reason, honor and property.

It bears noting that Mr Ibrahim's choice of wording is regrettable. The English word "infidel" carries with it strong connotations of exclusion and violence, inherited from the European experience of Christianity during the wars of religion which devastated that continent for decades. The Arabic "kafir" is a legal term which denotes very precisely and simply those outside the Muslim community, those who do not believe in the particular message and worldview of Islam. The much less charged translation "non-believer" is appropriate here, especially when there are explicit instructions accompanying any statement exhorting towards living in peace and harmony.

Muslims must always continue to speak out for the values of justice and mercy we hold dear, quite independent of what motives others may attribute to us. Indeed it is an act of allegiance to Islamic tradition to maintain at all costs that Christians in Egypt, though they diverge from us Muslims theologically, remain part of our nation, and that they must not be put in harm's way at any cost.

http://www.ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=158

<http://theamericanmuslim.org/tam.php/features/articles/sh.-ali-gomaa>

The Challenge of Moderation in Islam: Egypt's Religious Institution Versus Extremism

**The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University
1619 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington D.C.
1:00-3:00 pm, October 7, 2009**

Source: Pomed.org

The Middle East Studies Program at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies and the United States Institute of Peace sponsored a presentation by Grand Mufti of Egypt Ali Gomaa on the topic of combating extremism in Islam. Gomaa began the event by discussing the basis in Islam for moderation.

Both the Quran and the Hadith emphasize mercy, he said. He laid out the history of Islam, in which he claimed Islam respected pluralism and freedom of belief. The extremist versions of Islam, including those that discriminate against women are more recent distortions of the message of the Quran. He explained how it is easy to take Quranic verses out of context. Muslims and non-Muslims, he said, can find common ground in the concept of respecting fellow human beings. For that reason, he enumerated his priorities:

rejection of extremism and violence, justice, education, environmental protections, and human rights. He said he works for change, but this change must come from within Egypt and not at the behest of outside powers. Most Muslims are receptive to the messages of moderate Islam presented by scholars. The problem, Gomaa said, arises when Muslims who are not scholars create interpretations of Islam that are not in line with the texts. He argued that there are degrees of extremists, and that the most dangerous are those extremists who personally carry out violent acts. He has seen success, he says, in rehabilitating terrorists to the point where they do not personally carry out attacks, even if they remain extremist in thought. This arrangement does not imply agreement with extremism, but is an improvement over violence. He pointed out, however, that terrorism is not popular with most Muslims, for the simple reason that it disrupts their lives and can affect their income.

When asked whether Egypt's lack of political freedoms and government accountability might be driving young people to violence as a way of expressing their political will, Gomaa agreed that increasing freedoms and democratic institutions should be a part of Egypt's agenda. However, democracy cannot be imported from other countries. This would result in a conflict between democracy and liberalism. He argued that if democracy were placed before liberalism, liberalism would be set back a few steps. If liberalism were pursued before democracy, however, civil war would erupt. On the specific issue of the Muslim Brotherhood, Gomaa argued that it must choose between being a political party and a charitable organization.

Because its leaders insist on using religion to garner support, it cannot be a political party. Allowing one party to claim to be the Islamic party would imply that the other parties were not Islamic, which is incompatible with the constitutional idea that all of Egypt's laws are Islamic. Freedom, democracy and an end to corruption are all parts of the moderate Muslim agenda, but this must be done in a way that is appropriate for Egypt. Though Gomaa works to promote moderate Islam, he insisted that Al-Azhar is primarily an educational establishment and not a political or military institution.

http://www.ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=159

<http://pomed.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/sais-ali-gomaa-event-10-7.pdf>

Islam and Peace: Global Peace Report 2010

Source: Ali-gomaa.com

The rise of extremism in the Muslim world has led to the wide spread view of Islam as a religion of violence, retribution and war. This is in complete opposition to the truth of our religion and, on behalf of the vast majority of the 1.3 billion Muslims who are ordinary, peace-loving, decent people, I want to repudiate the actions of a misguided criminal minority.

Firstly, they contradict the central theme of peace in Islam. Peace is the greeting of Muslims amongst themselves, the last word spoken by a Muslim amongst themselves, the last word spoken by a Muslim in his prayers, one of God's names, and one of the names of Paradise.

Secondly, the Quran permits freedom of belief for all of mankind by saying, "*To you is your religion and to me is mine.*"

Thirdly, the use of violence is prohibited in spreading the faith. The Quran explicitly states: "*There is no compulsion in religion*", and "*Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good counsel and discuss with them in the most kindly manner*", and "*God does not prevent you from being kind to those who have not fought you on account of your religion or expelled you from your homes, nor from dealing justly with them, indeed God loves the just.*"

Fourthly – and this is very important – none of these extremists have been educated in genuine centers of Islamic learning. They are, rather, products of troubled environments, and their aim is purely political and has no religious foundation.

Thus, terrorists are criminals, not Muslim activists. My fear is that these extremists will convince the world that the entire Muslim world is the enemy, and that a war on terror is a war on the entire Muslim world. The Quran tell us, "*O people, we have created you from a single male and female and divided you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another.*" When God said "*to know one another*", He did not mean in order to kill one another. Whom should we trust? Should we trust the extremists, or that upon which the entirety of Islamic civilization has been built over 1,400 years? The first Prophetic saying that is taught to a student of Islam is, "*Those who show mercy are shown mercy*

by the All Merciful. Show mercy to those on earth and the One in the heavens will show mercy on you." Should we trust the extremists' views, or the freedom of choice and belief that Islam has enjoined upon us? The Quran says, "*Truth comes from God, whoever believes let them believe and whoever does not, let them not believe.*" The clarity of this verse is surely there for all to see. One of the problems in all religions today is that lay- people attempt to set themselves up as religious authorities even thought they lack the scholarly qualifications for making valid interpretations of religious law and morality. These interpretations are made in reaction to political crises, injustices, poverty and frustration, and our role as religious leaders who have spent our lives carefully studying religious exegesis is to reestablish proper authority and guide the people accordingly.

There are more than 6,000 verses in the Quran, only 300 of which are related to legal matters; the rest deal with developing good moral character. There are over 60,000 Prophetic traditions and sayings of which only 2,000 are related to legal matters; the rest deal with developing good moral character. For over a thousand years, ordinary Muslims have worshipped God, engaged in developing their society, and have sought to cultivate good moral character. This is made clear in the Quran which says, "*He caused you to dwell on earth and to develop it.*" From my long study of Islam and its history, I can attest that it is free of ethnic cleansing, religious inquisitions and forced conversions. This may seem contrary to the popular contemporary view of Islam, but it is an opinion that has been confirmed by a study carried out by Richard W. Bulliet, who demonstrated that while the body politic of Islam spread quickly, it took hundreds of years for populations to convert to the faith. Islam was spread by love, intermarriage and family relations, not by the sword.

We all need to learn from history and call people to work for the betterment of our societies for our children and grandchildren in a manner in which all are given their due respect and recognize their duties to one another. This is what we understand from personal freedom. Can we achieve this? The hope that we can serve as my inspiration, and I pray that you join me in this so that we can realize these goals.

http://www.ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=162

Chapter 5: Muslim Minority

Key positions:

- Some dangerous symbols are on the rise in Europe to act as a curtailment of the freedom to practice religion; a right which should be enhanced and safeguarded not diminished. i.e the Swiss ban of building minarets.
- An urgent invitation to governments in Europe and around the Mediterranean should be made to seriously reflect on the hard realities of discrimination witnessed in places like Sarajevo as an example of what can happen when interreligious and social tensions are allowed to grow until open conflict is the result.
- Serious questions need vigorous efforts and collaborations to be answered. Questions like How are religiously defined minorities and immigrant communities best provided for in ways that respect their needs and those of the wider communities around them? How is integration to be managed without threatening assimilation? Are there general principles of good practice we can all adopt in regard to what it means in practical terms to uphold the freedom of religion and the freedom to practice one's religion as well? How can the religiously informed conscience find its place in our various societies?
- It will take courage for each religious tradition truly to hear the criticisms and fears of others, yet we must find ways to facilitate serious engagement with the fears that exist.
- Each faith must resist the temptation to imagine only the best about itself whilst comparing this with the worst that can be imagined of others.
- Each tradition must model the generosity it desires for itself from others: we must each reciprocate the freedoms we seek for ourselves.
- Governments need courage too as they cannot be allowed to ignore religion or to be party to the denial of the rights which the free practice of faith requires.

- While we differ on important matters of theology, every place of prayer and worship, whether it is a mosque a church or a synagogue, speaks to a shared and fundamental aspect of human experience, namely that we are all spiritual beings able to respond to the call of the holy and the call of God.

Articles & News of the Grand Mufti on the Issue of the Rights of Religious Minorities

Is the Swiss ban an opportunity?

Source: guardian.co.uk

The recent vote in Switzerland banning the construction of new minarets has already become notorious. This is sad of itself and casts an unnecessary shadow on the remarkable history of tolerance, hospitality and integration that is the true story of Switzerland. It is important to remember however that this vote in no way changes the fundamental affirmation in the Swiss constitution that "*The freedom of religion and philosophy is guaranteed. All persons have the right to choose their religion or philosophical convictions freely, and to profess them alone or in community with others.*" It is important to note also that the Swiss government, the leaders of the Christian community and most of the media in Switzerland have all expressed their opposition to this amendment and their disappointment that it was approved.

Nonetheless, much as the minaret seems somehow to have stood as a proxy for far wider concerns, the vote itself now stands as a dangerous symbol of the curtailment of the freedom to practice religion and does so in a way that may have ramifications across Europe and beyond, where this freedom needs to be enhanced and safeguarded not diminished. While the vote on minarets can be seen as a moment of risk it should also be seen as a moment of opportunity. It is not enough to deplore the vote and pass on. What is needed now is a serious engagement with the underlying issues. What were they? What information or distortions led to the opinions and beliefs that entailed the vote? What needs to be done about the fears that were evidently at work?

We write as a mufti from Egypt where Christians and Muslims have lived side by side over the centuries and as a bishop of one of the world's largest and most diverse cities, namely London. As Co-chairs of the C-1 World Dialogue we are joined by a distinguished group including Theofilos the Greek patriarch of Jerusalem, Cardinal McCarrick, Mustafa Cerić the grand mufti of Bosnia and many other leaders from business, academia and the media. We are united by our commitment to the better understanding of issues causing tension so that

we can promote practical work that will bring about real improvement. In that spirit we invite governments and religious leaders in Europe and around the Mediterranean especially, but not exclusively, to join us for a serious reflection upon the issues now raised. We suggest that we do this in Sarajevo, a city painfully redolent of the hard realities of what can happen when interreligious and social tensions are allowed to grow until open conflict is the result. We are inviting the UN's Alliance of Civilizations to join us in sponsoring and organizing this event.

The conference will not be about Switzerland but rather about the wider if parallel issues faced by many different countries. How are religiously defined minorities and immigrant communities best provided for in ways that respect their needs and those of the wider communities around them? How is integration to be managed without threatening assimilation? Are there general principles of good practice we can all adopt in regard to what it means in practical terms to uphold the freedom of religion and the freedom to practice one's religion as well? How can the religiously informed conscience find its place in our various societies?

It will take courage for each religious tradition truly to hear the criticisms and fears of others, yet we must find ways to facilitate serious engagement with the fears that exist. Each faith must resist the temptation to imagine only the best about itself whilst comparing this with the worst that can be imagined of others. Instead each tradition must model the generosity it desires for itself from others: we must each reciprocate the freedoms we seek for ourselves. But governments need courage too as they cannot be allowed ignore religion or to be party to the denial of the rights which the free practice of faith requires. Minarets are no more essential to Islam than church spires are to Christianity, yet each is unquestionably evocative of their respective faiths. Perhaps we do well to remember that spires and minarets both have at least one deep symbolism in common: they both seem to point us to heaven and remind us that beside each there is a place of prayer. Let us hope there is a moral here too. While we differ on important matters of theology, every place of prayer and worship, whether it is a mosque a church or a synagogue, speaks to a shared and fundamental aspect of human experience, namely that we are all spiritual beings able to respond to the call of the holy and the call of God. Moreover, authentic religion calls us not only to love God but

our neighbor as well. This is a highly practical obligation in which all persons of good will can share. We call upon leaders from religion, government and civil society to gather with us to find the ways that will best allow us all to recognize our differences while uniting in the peaceful pursuit of the common good.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=99

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2009/dec/11/minarets-islam-christianity-chartres-gomaa>

Grand Mufti launches a counter ad campaign in New York subway in response to hate ads against Islam

Source: hidayaresearch.com

In response to the incendiary ads placed in New York City's subway by the anti Islam writer, Pamela Geller from The American Freedom Defense Initiative (AFDI) along with the offensive caricatures published by a satirical Spanish magazine, Sheikh Ali Gomaa, the Grand Mufti of Egypt is cooperating with the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) which is one of the largest Islamic organizations in the US and Canada in order to launch a counter campaign of placing flyers and posters in New York subway introducing Prophet Muhammad and Islam. The Islamic counter campaign seeks to place introductory ads about Islam in all subway stations in New York.

When it comes to the Spanish satirical magazine, El Jueves, which published defaming cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, Dr. Ibrahim Negm, the advisor of the Grand Mufti commented saying "*These heinous attempts of defamation are only conducted by low budget newspapers and magazines which have no ratings in media.*" He further added that these magazines aim at wider circulation and higher profit margin by using free publicity. As a response to these satirical cartoons, Dr. Negm communicated with a number of Spanish newspapers and sent them an article by Sheikh Ali Gomaa to be published within days in the Spanish journals as a response to the reckless attack on the Prophet of Islam.

Dr. Negm further added that the series of offensive acts against Islam and Muslims are not going to end in the age of the globalized media and for this reason we need to break the cycle of action and reaction and take a new path which aims at clarification and offering our religious insights with wisdom and kindness.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=130

<http://hidayaresearch.com/anti-islam-ads-at-subway-stations-in-new-york/>

Launching signature campaign in New York against the genocide of Burmese Muslims in Myanmar

Source: Ali-gomaa.com

Dr. Ibrahim Negm, the advisor of the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Dr. Ali Gomaa, collected more than 10,000 signatures from the Muslim community in New York to present it to the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon and the department of Foreign Affairs in the USA. This move came as a response to the continuous atrocious massacres that the Burmese Muslims are subjected to by extremist religious groups in Myanmar and with the support of the Burmese government.

Negm hopes that this campaign stirs the international community and draws its attention to the unheard voices of the persecuted Muslims in Burma who have been the subject of constant aggression and the victim of sectarianism in Myanmar. Negm adds that the announcement of the signature campaign came during his delivery of Eid al Fitr sermon in New York and he expressed his happiness with the quick response of thousands of Muslims who rushed after Eid prayer to sign their names in support of this humanitarian cause.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa was appalled by the outrageous sectarian campaigns of genocide targeting the Muslims in Burma in Rakhine Province. The Muslims in this province have recently been subjected to horrendous wave of killings and persecution along with demolition of their houses and destruction of their properties and mosques. These planned acts are perpetrated by the organized extremist Buddhist Magh group with the blessings of the dictatorial Buddhist regimes in Burma.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa urges the international world to support the persecuted Muslims in Burma who suffer from constant persecution for the last 60 years and are deprived of obtaining full citizenship which would make them equal to other citizens of Burma. On the historical background of the current wave of attacks on the Muslims of Burma, the Arkhine province in Burma embraced Islam in the 9th century and it became an independent Islamic country until it was occupied by the Buddhist king, Budabay, in 1784 and the province became part of Burma out of fear of the spread of Islam in the region.

The number of population in Burma exceeds 50 million and 15% of them are Muslims. With the new wave of democracy in Burma, the Burmese government declared that it will grant full citizenship to the Muslims in the Arkhine province. This act is threatening to the extremist groups in Burma as they are afraid of the spread of Islam in this region.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=100

Book: The Epistemology of Excellence: A Journey into the Life and Thoughts of the Grand Mufti of Egypt

Source: Chapter 6 on Muslim Minorities

Sheikh Ali Gomaa's perspective on Muslim minorities is driven by the overriding imperative for Muslim populations to live in a convivial manner with other segments of society. The precise nature that this social conviviality takes depends largely on the dynamics between Muslims and non-Muslims in the various regions of the world, including their customs, political systems, and historical experiences. However, in what constitutes a significant advance with respect to the theory of Muslim minority populations, the Sheikh has laid out a set of models derived from his reading of the Prophet's life (*sīra*), through which Muslim communities might understand their own particular situations in the contemporary world.

Dr. Ali is of the position that the classical legal dichotomy between a realm of Islam (dar al-Islam) and a realm of war (dar al-harb) is no longer applicable given the current arrangement of global politics. Inspired by the example of the Prophet in four distinct phases of the Muslim community during his lifetime, Dr. Ali suggests that we may instead understand Muslim belonging and community as following one of the following: the Meccan model, the Abyssinian model, the early Medinan model, and the later Medinan model.

The Meccan model recognizes that Muslims may well find themselves in a hostile society which seeks to oppress and marginalize them. Mecca during the early part of the Prophet's mission was characterized by indecency and low morality. The weak were taken advantage of by the strong, and discrimination based on class and race was rampant. The Muslims were in this context very few, and so they were called upon to exercise the virtue of patience, and to endure this difficult state of affairs. In response to this situation, many Muslims emigrated to Abyssinia. Though also a non-Muslim nation, Muslims enjoyed the protection of the Abyssinian Negus, a Christian king, and were given the opportunity to practice their religion freely. This persisted despite the efforts of the Meccan enemies of Islam to dissuade the Negus from his tolerant ways. This presents a great example of religious communities living together in religious freedom, a true model of citizenship in which the relevant virtues are allegiance and participation in public life.

After the Prophet's migration, the early Medinan community consisted of Muslims, Jews, Hypocrites, and Pagans. Given this variety, the Prophet wrote what is sometimes known as the Constitution of Medina. This document was characterized by four major principles: a commitment to a peaceful and secure environment for all; a protection of religious freedom for all communities; open opportunity for public participation in the realms of the economy, politics and military; and an affirmation of individual responsibility. This example lays the groundwork for a "social contract," comprising a commitment to citizenship blind to religious and tribal differences, the codification of laws, and the writing of a constitution applicable to all. Finally, the late Medinan model is one in which the Muslims dominated.

However, it is incorrect to say that Medina had no diversity in this period. To the contrary, many texts point to the existence of Jews and Hypocrites who continued to live as normal citizens in the city-state of Medina. These individuals were treated with great justice in all matters, and found in Medina a fair and equitable government. Similarly, under the leadership of the Prophet, Medina initiated relations with other governments on the principle of fairness, justice and magnanimity. These four models are, for Dr. Ali Gomaa, enduring Prophetic examples, for both individuals and states, on how to live with others. Either one or some hybrid of these will certainly apply to the situations encountered by contemporary Muslims, and can be adopted to guide Muslims' engagements with their societies. The role of contemporary jurists and leaders is to understand both the circumstances in their various locales and to deepen their understanding of the Prophetic biography so as to arrive at an approach which is most suitable for their constituents.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa, the West, and Muslim Minorities Contacts between Sheikh Ali Gomaa and the Muslim communities in the West have been multifaceted. They have included personal visits to the West; teaching and supervision of Western Muslim students; the provision of religious advice to Muslim minorities; and more generally an intellectual engagement with the West in its myriad forms. For a scholar living in the 20th and 21st centuries, it is perhaps only natural that Sheikh Ali Gomaa should dedicate a considerable amount of his time reflecting on the Western civilization, its internal dynamism and seemingly universal power. In his engagement with the West, Sheikh Ali Gomaa has repeatedly emphasized that it should not be seen as

a monolithic bloc. The challenge for the Grand Mufti lies precisely in making sense of the specific nature of Western civilization while taking its internal diversity into account.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa differentiates between five groups or components in the West: the first group is often hostile and motivated by a deep dislike and mistrust of Islam; the second is also hostile to Islam, but only because it is misled by the media; the third group is neutral and, being neutral, it is often surprised at the hatred directed against Muslims by some sections of Western society; the fourth group has Islamic sympathies and supports the just causes of Muslims; the fifth group is itself Muslim, made up of converts and descendants of Muslim immigrants. The latter group is a recent phenomenon. Muslims in the West now number several millions; they are solicited by politicians and their voices impact decisively on election results in several Western countries.

As Sheikh Ali Gomaa points out, the current power of Western Muslims is unprecedented since the Fall of Granada. The inclusion of Western Muslim communities into the conceptualization of the West demonstrates Sheikh Ali Gomaa's willingness to think outside simplistic binaries. It is also symptomatic of Sheikh Ali's interest in, and concern for, the situation of Muslims living in the West.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa has had the good fortune of travelling widely across the world, from Japan and South Korea in the East to the USA in the West, covering over 50 countries in total. Thanks partly to the trust and support of Sheikh Gad al-Haqq, who saw the promise of Sheikh Ali's capacities early on, Ali Gomaa has since the early 1970s been part of official Al-Azhar delegations travelling abroad. Since 1980 – the date of his first trip to the United States - many of these travels have taken him to Western lands. Three decades of personal visits and experiences have made Sheikh Ali familiar with the specific questions and dilemmas of Muslim communities established in Europe and North America. The contacts with the West have only intensified since 2003, when Sheikh Ali Gomaa became Grand Mufti of Egypt. His official functions now lead him to travel regularly – sometimes twice a month – to countries in Europe and North America. As a Muslim scholar recognized for his mastery of the traditional Islamic sciences, Sheikh Ali Gomaa is a much demanded and respected scholar amongst Muslims in the West. He has taught several batches of

Western students – in particular from North America – who have travelled to Al-Azhar in search of the kind of embodied Islamic knowledge that is not limited to classrooms. Sheikh Ali Gomaa's sermons at Sultan Hasan Mosque in Cairo in the late 1990s were religiously followed by a whole generation of Western Muslims. A number of them have since become imams, scholars, and professors of Islamic Studies in American universities in their own right. Sheikh Ali Gomaa's revival of the traditional system of the dars (public lesson) was welcomed by those Western students of knowledge in search of the pure Islamic tradition. Indeed, many of the students enrolled at the Azhar University actively sought and attended Sheikh Ali Gomaa's commentary of classical *usulī* texts in the 1990s and 2000s in mosques across Cairo.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa's appeal for Muslims in the West is further enhanced by the Mufti's insistence that Islam is capable of engaging with the global concerns of Muslims worldwide, and by his unwillingness to discourse about Islam and the West as if they constituted two mutually-exclusive and competing fields. His intellectual sophistication and his command of the English language have rendered the Mufti a privileged interlocutor of Muslim scholars and activists based in the West. These widely-recognized features of Sheikh Ali, allied to his openness and accessibility, have also made the Mufti a much demanded partner in the Western academic, interfaith, media, and policy-making worlds. Such status is probably unparalleled in the world of Islamic academia today.

Given the interconnectedness of the current world, the Mufti has perhaps inevitably become one of the most prominent voices of the ummah speaking authoritatively on Islam in the West. He is regularly asked to offer his own authoritative opinion and commentary on current events and future directions.

In order to facilitate the access to Islamic knowledge for Muslim Diasporas, Sheikh Ali Gomaa has supervised the transformation of Dār al- Iftā into a truly global religious institution. Realizing the potential of new technologies, Sheikh Ali Gomaa has turned Dār al- Iftā into a multimedia institution answering questions from believers across the world in nine different languages (Arabic, English, French, German, Malay, Urdu, Turkish, Russian and Indonesian) by letter, telephone and the internet. He has also established a full-fledged

department of translation within Dār al- Iftā. The mufti training courses that Sheikh Ali supervises at Dār al- Iftā has helped equip students of knowledge from the West to the difficult task of fatwa-giving. In order to facilitate the training of students outside Egypt, Sheikh Ali Gomaa has recently initiated plans to provide the same courses online via e-learning.

After the tragic events of 9/11 Sheikh Ali Gomaa could not remain indifferent to the increasingly urgent nature of the questions being asked about Islam and Muslims living in the West. As the Mufti of Egypt, Sheikh Ali Gomaa has intervened in global public debates about the Muslim presence in the West, the problematics of integration, and the root causes of Islamophobia. He has published opinion columns in the most prominent newspapers, such as the New York Times or the Washington Post, consistently outlining his moderate understanding of Islam. Sheikh Ali Gomaa has sought to build bridges with Western partners, stressing the commonalities between Islam and Christianity, at a time marked by discourses on the clash of civilizations. Rather than attack, or defend, Sheikh Ali Gomaa has repeatedly invited his interlocutors to partake in a common word. The Mufti urges Muslims and non-Muslims to work together in a common search for the beauty of the universe. His contribution to interfaith dialogue is recognized at the highest level in the West. In a visit to Cairo, Jorge Sampaio, the High Representative of the UN Alliance of Civilizations, has personally expressed his appreciation of the Mufti's efforts in this field.

Despite a hectic schedule, Sheikh Ali Gomaa continues to support the participation of Dār al- Iftā in conferences and meetings across the Western world in order to provide a counterbalance to the antagonistic discourse against Islam that has spread throughout the West – in particular in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. In his official meetings with Ambassadors of Western countries in Egypt, the Mufti has expressed concern over the security of Muslims, notably after the murder of Marwa El-Sherbini in the German city of Dresden. Sheikh Ali has also encouraged governments to welcome the participation of Muslims and include them in positions of public office where Muslims can serve their countries. The Mufti has in this regard expressed appreciation for the recent efforts of the Obama administration. He has above all demonstrated to the representatives of the world's nations his willingness to contribute to the spread of a culture of tolerance and moderation amongst Muslim minorities.

While offering his own advice when requested, Sheikh Ali Gomaa has also emphasized the importance of dealing with local Muslims based in the West and more familiar with the dynamics on the ground. Sheikh Ali has stressed in particular the benefits of collegiality. In the wake of the protracted French debate on the Muslim headscarf, Sheikh Ali Gomaa called in early 2004 for devising an integration protocol for Muslims in the West. This document should regulate the lives of Muslims in Western societies, providing guidelines for their integration in light of the principles of Human Rights and state religious neutrality. The protocol should be binding on all parties in order to prevent a repetition of the “minor matters” that have preoccupied Western public debate in recent times. All parties involved – statesmen, Western intellectuals, Muslims living in the West and the scholars of the ummah – should be involved in the drafting of the document. Sheikh Ali Gomaa characteristically stressed that while Al-Azhar can play a consultative role in the project, the initiative should originate from the West itself.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa has expressed an appreciation of the religious freedoms offered to Muslims in the West. Although the Islamic view of religion and politics differs from the Western perception, Ali Gomaa recognizes that secularism has largely succeeded in establishing a pluralistic outlook conducive to spreading the message of Islam. The freedom of Muslims in the West to take up residence, practice their religion and express their beliefs openly implies that Western lands can no longer be described as Dar al-Harb (the land of war) or Dar al-Kufr (the land of disbelief). At the same time, however, Sheikh Ali Gomaa has called upon Western state authorities to deal pragmatically with religious issues that impact on politics. Rather than insisting on a principled separation between religion and politics, Ali Gomaa hopes that Western states recognize the complex interrelations between the two spheres and work with Muslims to solve any problems that may arise in the process of integration of Muslims in Europe and North America. In this regard, the Indian experience of managing religious diversity under a secular regime provides important lessons that might be reflected upon in the West.

In 2006, the Mufti of Egypt proposed the organization of a conference gathering a broad spectrum of Western Muslim scholars to debate the issues of Islam in the West. A few years later, in 2009, Sheikh Ali Gomaa suggested the creation of a World Islamic Federation for

Muslim Minority Affairs including representatives of all minority communities across the world. This Federation could act as a link between Muslim minorities and the official Islamic institutions in Muslim lands. Among its aims would be the protection of the Muslim identity, the dissemination of Islamic moderation (*wasatiyya*), and the provision of Sharī'ah solutions to the problems of Muslim minorities.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa's interest in the issues of Muslim minorities is not restricted to North American and Western Europe. As the Mufti made clear in a meeting with the Ambassador of Thailand in 2009, Dār al- Iftā is willing to play its role in disseminating Islamic moderation and providing training for preachers of Muslim minorities across the world. At the request of the Ambassador of Thailand, Sheikh Ali Gomaa accepted to cooperate in the establishment and administration of Sharī'ah courts for matters of personal status law in the south of Thailand. The Mufti furthermore welcomes Muslim students from Thailand (and other minority communities) to enter into Dār al- Iftā's three-year training programs after graduation from Al-Azhar. This offer of training and collaboration has been replicated in a recent meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo. Sheikh Ali Gomaa reiterated there his willingness to establish training programs, welcome Kosovar scholars to Egypt, and train their local muftis, with the aim of spreading Islamic moderation and protecting the religious identity of the Muslim community.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa has asked Western authorities to rely on trusted religious institutions such as Al-Azhar in their dealings with Muslims, rather than some self-proclaimed "Islamic scholars" who preach extremism. He has repeatedly called upon Western countries to institutionalize Islamic religious authority in the West with the support of Al-Azhar in order to facilitate the participation of Muslims in the social life. He has also followed closely efforts to institutionalize fatwa councils in the West, notably through the European Council for Fatwa and Research, and has accompanied the emerging reflection on what is known as *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* (Muslim jurisprudence of minorities). Ali Gomaa agrees that Muslim minorities in the West may require particular *fiqh* solutions to their problems. This recognition, the Mufti points out, is not in itself new. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Sheikh 'Abd Al-Rahman Ilaysh suggested that there could be an interpretation of Islamic Law specifically designed for Muslim minorities, and that Western Muslim scholars might constitute in the future

a new school of Islamic thought. Sheikh Ilaysh's opinions are consonant with Sheikh Ali's own views. Ali Gomaa has also stressed the pioneering contributions to the development of an understanding of Islam rooted in the West by contemporary scholars such as Fathi Othman, Taha Jabir al-Alwani and 'Abd al Hamid Abu Sulayman, as well as by European converts like Martin Lings, Rene Guenon, Frithjof Schuon, Muhammad Asad, and Jeffrey Lang.

In his speeches geared towards Muslim minorities, Sheikh Ali Gomaa has called upon them to integrate without assimilating and forgetting their Islamic roots. The Mufti has emphasized the resourceful variety of historical models provided within the Islamic tradition. As pointed out earlier, The Mufti distinguishes in particular between four paradigms: Islam in Mecca before the Hijra; Islam in Abyssinia, Islam in the first Medinan period (pluralistic Medina with Jewish communities) and in the second Medinan period (Medina without Jewish communities). Each historical period provides particular lessons and wisdoms that can be appropriated by contemporary Muslims living in non-Muslim lands.

For the Mufti of Egypt, the specificities of each historical period have had a formative impact on the Muslim personality, teaching him the values of patience (*al-sabr*), living harmoniously with the other (*al-ta'āyush*), loyalty (*al-wafā'*), participation (*al-mushāraka*), openness (*al-infitāh*), cooperation (*al-ta'āwun*), justice ('*adl*), awareness of the affairs and the times (*al-wa'i bi-l-sha'n wa-l-zaman*). Such values, Ali Gomaa contends, lie at the heart of the religion of God (Islam) in all times and places. They must be productively engaged today by Muslims living as minorities in the contemporary world. This might be particularly true today, given the rise of anti-Muslim sentiment in the West. While Ali Gomaa does not deny the need to counter Islamophobic discourse, he constantly stresses the importance of following the Prophetic model of starting with oneself and of being patient.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa has also urged Muslims in the West to play the role of a bridge between civilizations (*al-wasat al-hadari*); to participate in Western societies by establishing institutions helping the poor and the needy; to be tolerant of religious diversity; and to fight extremism. In his opening speech given at the 47th annual conference of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), Sheikh Ali Gomaa stressed the place of *rahma* (mercy) in Islam and argued

authoritatively that Islam and Christianity share two fundamental values: love of God and love of the neighbor. He has repeatedly advised Muslims (and non-Muslims) to distinguish between cultural practices and religious dogmas. Given his standing as a recognized Muslim scholar and his position as the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Sheikh Ali Gomaa has often been asked to deliver fatwas on issues facing Muslim minorities – at one point even collaborating directly with the Fiqh Council of North America. The bulk of the fatwas on Muslim minorities issued by the Mufti will be published in a separate volume in the middle of 2012. Some of Sheikh Ali Gomaa's opinions – especially when dealing with controversial and pressing matters – have nevertheless been widely discussed. One such fatwa was related to the permissibility (or otherwise) of women leading the Friday prayer. Given the sociological dynamics of the Muslim communities in the West, Sheikh Ali Gomaa expected that question to be asked sooner or later. In his answer he stressed that women praying behind man is not a form of degradation but rather a means of honoring women. While some have permitted women to lead the prayer under certain conditions, the majority have disallowed it, and it has never been the practice of the Muslim community.

Another set of pressing issues for Muslims in the West relates to economic transactions involving usury or other factors usually prohibited in Islamic Law. Sheikh Ali Gomaa has preferred to adopt the established Hanafi position permitting contracts in non-Muslim lands that would normally be prohibited in Muslim lands as long as they do not involve deception. While accepting the legal foundations of the Hanafi reasoning on this issue, Sheikh Ali Gomaa has nevertheless made clear that the contemporary West must not be considered as a space of war (*Dar al-Harb*) since the religious freedoms granted to its current inhabitants make the situation totally different from the historical context in which the earlier Hanafi jurists wrote their treatises.

Misperceptions of Islam in the West

Sheikh Ali Gomaa has taken a keen interest in solving the problem of misperceptions and misrepresentations of Islam in the West. Western scholarship on Islam, the media coverage of Muslims, and the flawed ideas disseminated by school textbooks in the West lie at the centre of Sheikh Ali's efforts. In his capacity as the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Sheikh Ali Gomaa has used his meetings with US and Euro-

pean officials in Cairo to urge Western authorities to correct the antagonistic descriptions of Islam contained in many school textbooks. Sheikh Ali was personally involved in the production of a documentary on Islam to be shown to pupils in English schools. He has also cooperated with German scholars in the development of Islamic curricula for German state schools, in particular in the state of Saxony.

Along with a team of scholars, Sheikh Ali Gomaa participated in a systematic study of - and response to - the questions and doubts (*shubuhāt*) raised by Westerners about Islam. No less than 40,000 issues of varying importance were identified. Sheikh Ali Gomaa contributed to the detailed answers to these issues, fulfilling a collective obligation upon the ummah. The results were subsequently published in 28 volumes and remain a reference book for those interested. Unfortunately, as Sheikh Ali Gomaa recognizes, these scholarly efforts seem to have a limited impact upon their intended readership.

In terms of substance Sheikh Ali perceptively identified four key areas of misunderstanding: the status of the Qur'an; the universality of the Islamic message; jihad; and the place of women in Islam. He has used every possibility available to him to correct these misperceptions. In an exchange facilitated by the Common Ground News Service (republished in the Egyptian daily newspaper Al-Ahram in spring 2006 under the title "Questions from America"), Sheikh Ali Gomaa clarified his own positions regarding these four issues. In relation to the Holy Book of Islam, Sheikh Ali Gomaa has emphasized the differences between the Qur'an and the sacred texts recognized by other religious traditions. Unlike the Qur'an, which was revealed in Arabic and has been preserved in its original form, other sacred scriptures have been edited, translated and otherwise revised. It is precisely the unchanging and eternal character of the Islamic Sacred Book that finds its authority in the eyes of Muslims.

Ali Gomaa has also sought to reassure those non-Muslims who may view the status of the Qur'an as a problem by stressing that the absoluteness of the Qur'an does not preclude interpretation, contrary to what is often believed in the West. The Islamic tradition distinguishes between equivocal and unequivocal verses. Furthermore, out of some 6000 Qur'anic verses, only 300 deal with legal and ethical questions. 95% of the Qur'an is in fact concerned with the building of human character, establishing ethics, reason and spirituality.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa has repeatedly emphasized the universality of the Islamic message. Unlike most other religions, Islam is a religion which was sent - through the prophecy of Muhammad - to all of Mankind. This universality lies at the heart of the concept of the Muslim ummah, the community of believers, and helps to establish two kinds of bonds: the brotherhood in faith that unites all Muslims irrespective of nationality, ethnicity or status; and the brotherhood of the human species that unites human beings beyond religious affiliation. The universality of the religion is also captured in the four historical paradigms of Islam: the Meccan period, the Abassynian period, and the first and second Medinan periods (see above).

Sheikh Ali recognizes the great confusion that surrounds the Islamic concept of jihad. He categorically denies that Islam spread through the sword, or that jihad can be equated with Holy War. Drawing on the writings of the authors most likely to be recognized as neutral by his Western interlocutors - Orientalists such as Thomas Carlyle (*On Heroes and Hero Worship*), Gustave Le Bon (*La civilisation des arabes*) and Richard Bulliet - Ali Gomaa has shown that the dissemination of Islam across the world is due to persuasion rather than coercion. The conversion of local peoples was slow and gradual, often taking place many centuries after the original Islamic conquest, thus demonstrating the famous Qur'anic dictum "there is no compulsion in Islam".

Sheikh Ali Gomaa has also sought to respond in different fora to accusations that Islam degrades the status of women. Sheikh Ali recognizes the complexity of the issue: some of the accusations are driven by ignorance, he argues; others result from real differences in the philosophical understanding of the place of women between Muslims and non-Muslims. Inheritance shares provide an instance of ignorance of Islam in the West. Rather than a proof of inequality between the sexes, Sheikh Ali Gomaa points out that inheritance shares vary according to situation. In many instances, women receive more than, or the same as, their male relatives. Crucially, the inheritance in Islam is embedded in a comprehensive understanding of social rights and duties. The inequality of inheritance shares between brother and sister has to be seen in the context of their respective obligations. As Sheikh Ali Gomaa points out, the male relative has the duty to support his wife, while the female relative has no financial obligations on her wealth.

Questions related to the headscarf, intermingling between the sexes, or physical disciplining of the wife present perhaps more intricate cases. Responding effectively to these questions from within the Islamic tradition and in a manner deemed to be understood by Western sensibilities requires a collaborative effort between Muslim scholars and activists (see for more details on the issue the chapter on women in this volume).

Sheikh Ali Gomaa has dealt with other misconceptions of Islam in the West at different junctures of his life and work as the Grand Mufti. He has exercised every effort to correct this image problem and to promote the true understanding of Islam as a moderate religion. His condemnation of terrorism has been unequivocal. His fatwa on terrorism states categorically that *"Terrorism is the product of corrupt minds, hardened hearts, and arrogant egos, and corruption, destruction, and arrogance are unknown to the heart attached to the divine"*. Sheikh Ali Gomaa was one of the signatories of the Amman Message, a document produced in the Jordanian capital in 2005 outlining the required qualifications for issuing fatwas in Islam, and hailed in the media as making the global war on terror much easier to fight. More recently, Sheikh Ali Gomaa has issued a statement in relation to the Fort Hood tragedy, insisting that the perpetrator of such acts does not represent Islam – a religion which considers human life to be sacred.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa has thus used his platforms and visits to demand that Westerners distinguish between Islam as a noble religion, and certain practices that are sensationalized in the media. He has repeatedly called for the establishment of clear guidelines supporting intercultural dialogue and combating Islamophobic discourse in the West. Sheikh Ali Gomaa has called upon Muslims to present the message of Islam in a deeper and more complete manner in order to fight stereotypes. The Mufti has also stressed that dialogue, in order to be effective, requires an acceptance of the other and a willingness to exchange ideas. Dialogue must therefore be distinguished from dissolution or assimilation into the Other's framework.

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Chapter 6: Responding to Offenses against Islam

Manual on how to react against anti Prophet Muhammad Hate Campaign:

This manual is designed in the wake of the recent rising wave of hate against Islam and Prophet Muhammad. As much as we vehemently condemn the heinous reckless acts of spreading hatred and sewing discord among religious communities through making belligerent movies and drawing satirical caricatures and the like, we are equally opposing the violent reaction of Muslims who were carried away with their unrestrained feelings of anger and went over board to jeopardize innocent lives, damage properties, burn flags and desecrate other faith's religious symbols. These kinds of irresponsible acts go against the teachings of Islam both in letter and spirit and lead to tarnishing the image of Islam in the world.

We assert that the Muslims' feeling of anger is both legitimate and expected as a result of these cheap attempts of desecrating Islam and defaming Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In this manual we offer legitimate ways of channeling this anger into positive action which serves as a healthy way of vetting out these angry emotions and also paves our way to display to the world our civilized manners and our overwhelming feelings of love and awe for Prophet Muhammad. Let's turn these hate campaigns into love festivals.

What is the first thing you should think about when you come across a belligerent movie or the like depicting Prophet Muhammad?

- You have to remember Prophet Muhammad's reaction towards insults directed against him and that he patiently endured all kinds of pain whether physically or emotionally for the sake of propagating Islam through wisdom and perfect manners.
- You have to remember that when Prophet Muhammad was under heavy siege from his people in Makkah and went to Taif trying to find an outlet to propagate his message, the arrogant leaders there vehemently refused his invitation over Islam and were harsh to him and sent their children and slaves to chase the Prophet out of the town throwing him with stones till he was covered in blood yet he refused

to pray to God to punish them and hoped that one day they might be guided to Islam.

- You have to remember that Prophet Muhammad never reacted to offenses against him with equal offenses but always forgave and used to let go. The famous story of the Jewish lady who used to throw garbage and wastes in his way every day and one day she missed her daily routine and the Prophet out of his tender heart was afraid that something wrong might have happened to her so he asked about her and knew she was ill. He knocked on her door and wished her speedy recovery.

- You have to remember that after being heavily persecuted by his people in Makkah and his companions were badly tortured for embracing Islam and their properties were confiscated and the Prophet himself had to emigrate to Medinah after miraculously surviving an assassination attempt, he never once thought of revenge and the idea of retaliation never came across his mind.

- You have to remember that when the Prophet had a strong army who can support him and defeat the people of Makkah if he wished, he entered Makkah with his forehead almost touching the back of the horse he was riding out of humbleness and veneration to God Almighty who brought him back to His sacred mosque victoriously. Prophet Muhammad looked at the scared eyes of the Makkahans who knew that they ought to be punished for the amount of pain and persecution that they carried out against the Prophet and the Muslims yet the Prophet told them "You are all free to go".

- You have to remember that Prophet Muhammad won the hearts of people worldwide with his embodiment of mercy and his perfection of manners.

- You have to remember that the Prophet's aim was to spread the merciful message of Islam and his eyes were fixed on how to be the best role model for guidance, love and compassion. How can we react towards the heinous offenses against Prophet Muhammad?

1- Conducting love festivals of invoking prayers of peace and blessings on Prophet Muhammad:

- First Muslims need to be organized in their actions and unified in their positions so we all must agree to abandon any violent reactions or deeds which tarnish our image and lead us to lose the sense of empathy of people around the world.
- We need to go out in peaceful protest which are legally permissible and set in a planned location where we make sure not to block the streets and interrupt traffic.
- We need to make sure not to be in the middle of the way so both cars and pedestrians can walk freely.
- We need to sit calmly and choose a leader to lead the invocations of peace and blessings on Prophet Muhammad.
- We can distribute handouts of the different designated formulas of the invocations of peace on the Prophet so we all can be on the same page.
- Once we start invoking these prayers on the Prophet, tears would be running down our cheeks out of love and awe to this beloved Prophet who has been wronged.
- We need to know that angels would be surrounding our blessed sessions of invocation of prayers on the Prophet and they would join us in chanting, showering us with mercy and love.

2- Use social media as a powerful tool to reintroduce Prophet Muhammad to the global eye:

- Muslims can easily set up pages on facebook and other media outlets with the aim of introducing Prophet Muhammad to non Muslims.
- Muslims should always stick to patience and have good manners and encourage non Muslims to raise their questions and demonstrate their concerns about issues relevant to Prophet Muhammad.

- Knowledgeable students of Islamic studies and professors of related fields can provide non Muslims with authenticated scholarly answers regarding what perplexes the mind of non Muslims.
- Uploading authentic books on Islam and Prophet Muhammad can be a major help for non Muslims to have some insights about Islam through some useful readings.

3- Going to foreign embassies offering handouts and authentic materials on Islam and Prophet Muhammad

- Muslims can organize themselves and go to foreign embassies within their countries and offer them a bag full of books and relevant materials introducing Islam and Prophet Muhammad and asking them to distribute among their personnel.

4- Public documentary about the life of Prophet Muhammad and free entry.

5- Marking an international day of showing love to Prophet Muhammad through invoking congregational session of peace and blessings on him in mosques and outdoors.

Creative ways of introducing Prophet Muhammad to the world:

- We announce a video competition in which the best video of dhizkr session of invoking peace and blessings on Prophet Muhammad will be uploaded.
- Poetry competition both in Arabic and English about Prophet Muhammad.
- Best narration of the story of Prophet Muhammad's life both in writing and audio or video.
- What is the characteristic that you love the most about Prophet Muhammad and why? Best answer will be published.

- To those who live in a non Muslim country, let your non Muslim friends ask one question about Prophet Muhammad and send it over to us with your answer.
- Imitate the Prophet in one of his numerous manners and send us your story and how you placed Prophet Muhammad as your role model.

Articles & News of the Grand Mufti on the Art of Responding to Offenses against Islam

Prophet Muhammad is ‘the mercy to all worlds’ to Muslims: Egypt’s mufti

Source: The Washington Post

It goes without saying that violence of any sort, whether inspired by religious sentiment or secular interests, must be condemned unequivocally and in the strongest terms possible. This is in keeping with the best of Muslim tradition, which abhors sectarian rife, interethnic conflict, and interreligious violence. This lesson is best contained in the example of the prophet Muhammad himself, who was repeatedly subjected to the worst treatment by his enemies, only to consistently disregard these insults and instead take the path of forgiveness, mercy and compassion. He is known to Muslims as “the mercy to all worlds.” Indeed, this example is most succinctly summarized in the Koran itself, which instructs believers as follows: “The good deed and the evil deed are not alike. Repel the evil deed with one which is better.”

The world is sorely in need of such lessons, which represent the authentic teachings of the Koran and the prophet of Islam. It is important to separate these noble messages from those that are bandied about by those who have no competencies in religious interpretation, Koranic hermeneutics or the history of Islamic thought. Unfortunately, the current state of the Muslim world is such that institutions and structures of legitimate authority have been weakened to such an extent that inflammatory rhetoric has taken the place of thoughtful analysis as a motivator of action and a guide for religious sentiment. We are today in desperate need of serious religious leaders who engage the reality of the modern world – complete with its challenges and difficulties – in order to create an environment in which people can coexist. This must be a joint effort from members of all faith groups and cultures. A necessary part of any such effort must be a sincere desire to understand what is behind the Muslims’ reverence for the prophet. For more than a billion Muslims around the world, Muhammad is their ultimate example. He is their reference point and, as the Koran explains, “dearer to them than their own selves.”

Prophets are the means, in the Islamic worldview, through which people have been taught about God. This is no less true for the succession of prophets that preceded Islam – including Abraham, Moses and Jesus – than it is for Muhammad himself. They are revered teachers who taught us the very nature of reality, the purpose of our existence, and how to connect with God Himself. As a result, Muslims strive to emulate the example of the prophet in every aspect of their lives.

They seek to inculcate the values in a deep and profound manner. These include, among other things, the ability to confront evil provocations with patience, tolerance and mercy. These are, for Muslims, spiritual values of the utmost importance, and they are best exemplified in the life of Muhammad himself. A famous story from his life is known to Muslims around the world. One of his enemies was a woman who lived above a street he used to pass daily, and would litter the streets with garbage as he walked past. One morning, when the prophet was walking by, he noticed no such provocation.

His response to this sudden reprieve was to ask after the woman's health, concerned that she had strayed from her daily routine, as painful as it might have been for himself. The stories of the prophet praying for his enemies, and exhibiting enormous steadfastness in the face of insults and provocations, are legion in Islamic literature.

This should be the Muslim ideal, there is no doubt. Unfortunately, it is not possible that everyone can live up to the ideal. What is clear is that people's attachment to the personage of the prophet is undiminished, even when they are unable for their own reasons to live up to the lessons he has taught. Insults against the prophet are taken as more serious than insults against one's own parents and family, indeed than one's own self. Muhammad is a sacred figure, who taught Muslims how to live in this world, and whose appearance in the world was a gift from the divine.

As such, inflammatory materials that are clearly designed to offend the deeply-held sensibilities of over a billion people around the world only contribute to the escalation of tensions with no observable benefit. Muslims should either ignore such provocations, or respond non-violently, as per the limits laid down by their religion.

Such limits have been obviously transgressed in recent days, and the broader Muslim religious establishment as well as the Coptic Church in Egypt all joined in calling for calm and not allowing this to further escalate.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/guest-voices/post/prophet-muhammad-is-the-mercy-to-all-worlds-to-muslims-egypts-mufti/2012/09/18/a0e7e10a-01ab-11e2-b260-32f4a8db9b7e_blog.html

Prophet Mohammad endured personal insults without retaliating

Source: Reuters

With the publication of yet another set of insulting cartoons against the Prophet of Islam, it is becoming increasingly obvious that we are living through dangerous times, in which the world has become alarmingly polarized and obstinate. The current crisis has been precipitated by a number of factors. There is no one single cause to which we can point, in the hopes that eradicating it will magically solve our problems. Rather, this is a complex matter, involving the inability of each side to misunderstand the worldviews and commitments of the other. The particulars of the events of the past week are known to all, but the underlying causes are deeper and more intractable, and cannot simply be wished away.

To properly understand them necessarily means taking seriously the politics that obtain between Islam and the West at this point in history. It is naive to simply point to individual films, cartoons, or writings which explicitly seek to provoke and insult Muslims as the motivating cause of these conflagrations. Rather, one must keep in mind the many points of conflict between Muslims and Westerners that obtain all over the world today. One need only scratch the surface to uncover grave violations associated with the war on Iraq, regular drone attacks in Yemen and Pakistan, the treatment of often innocent Muslims in Guantanamo, the demonization of Muslims by far-right European parties and the banning of their symbols by European legislatures, and the conflict that has persisted for decades in Palestine. To turn a blind eye to these serious and enduring conflicts is to remain wilfully oblivious to the underlying factors which make coexistence and rapprochement between Islam and the West so difficult.

In such a context, to then insist on igniting these simmering tensions by publishing hurtful and insulting material in a foolhardy attempt at bravado – asserting the superiority of Western freedoms over alleged Muslim closed-mindedness – verges on incitement. Of all Muslim symbols, there is perhaps none more sacred than the Prophet Muhammad himself. Muslims can barely utter his name before their conscience obliges them to pray for God to bless him and grant him peace.

Hundreds of millions of Muslims revere not only the Prophet, but the very city of Medina which he made his home, and ardently aspire to visit it at their first opportunity. It is no exaggeration to say that Muslims love the Prophet more dearly than their own selves, as the Qur'an characterizes them. To imagine then, crude representations of a man so dear to them is unbearable to the vast majority of Muslims.

None of this is to condone violence of any sort. Indeed, the example of the Prophet and his Companions – the greatest sources of Muslim normativity – bear witness to their enduring the worst insults from the non-believers of his time. Not only was his message routinely rejected, but he was often chased out of town, cursed at, and physically assaulted on numerous occasions. But his example was always to endure all personal insults and attacks without retaliation of any sort. There is no doubt that, since the Prophet is our greatest example in this life, this should also be the reaction of all Muslims. As the Qur'an instrucus, "*Be patient, as were the great prophets.*"

The call of all Muslim leaders must be to protest these instances of hate speech in only the most peaceful manner. Violence of any sort must be condemned outright. Here it is equally important to point out that some self-appointed religious leaders have failed to act responsibly. In the tense environment that currently prevails in the Muslim world, to display these provocations and to speculate on the supposed conspiracies behind them is to act recklessly. Unfortunately, the proliferation of satellite channels and other media have opened the door to all sorts of people who have only the advancement of their own interests and popularity in mind, and not the wellbeing of the Muslim nation, the Middle East, or the world at large. The Prophet Mohammad's example was always to endure all personal insults and attacks without retaliation of any sort.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=137

<http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2012/09/20/guestview-prophet-mohammad-endured-personal-insults-without-retaliating-grand-mufti/>

Defending the Prophet: Attacking others?

Source: moroccoworldnews.com

It goes without saying that violence of any sort, whether inspired by religious sentiment or secular interests, must be condemned unequivocally and in the strongest terms possible. This is in keeping with the best of Muslim tradition, which abhors sectarian rife, interethnic conflict, and interreligious violence. This lesson is best contained in the example of the Prophet Mohammed himself, who was repeatedly subjected to the worst treatment by his enemies, only to consistently disregard these insults and instead take the path of forgiveness, mercy and compassion. This is why he is known to Muslims as “the Mercy to all worlds.” Indeed, this example is most succinctly summarized in the Quran itself, which instructs believers as follows: “The good deed and the evil deed are not alike. Repel the evil deed with one which is better.”

The world is sorely in need of such lessons, which represent the authentic teachings of the Quran and the Prophet of Islam. It is important to separate these noble messages from those that are bandied about by those who have no competencies in religious interpretation, Quranic hermeneutics or the history of Islamic thought. Unfortunately, the current state of the Muslim world is such that institutions and structures of legitimate authority have been weakened to such an extent that inflammatory rhetoric has taken the place of thoughtful analysis as a motivator of action and a guide for religious sentiment. We are today in desperate need of serious religious leaders who engage the reality of the modern world – complete with its challenges and difficulties – in order to create an environment in which people can coexist. This must be a joint effort from members of all faith groups and cultures.

A necessary part of any such effort must be a sincere desire to understand what is behind the Muslims’ reverence for the Prophet. For more than a billion Muslims around the world, the Prophet Mohammed is their ultimate example. He is their reference point and, as the Quran explains: “dearer to them than their own selves.” Prophets are the means, in the Islamic worldview, through which people have been taught about God. This is no less true for the succession of Prophets that preceded Islam – including Abraham, Moses and Jesus – than it is for the Prophet Mohammed himself.

They are revered teachers who taught us the very nature of reality, the purpose of our existence, and how to connect with God Himself. As a result, Muslims strive to emulate the example of the Prophet in every aspect of their lives. They seek to inculcate the values in a deep and profound manner. These include, among other things, the ability to confront evil provocations with patience, tolerance and mercy. These are, for Muslims, spiritual values of the utmost importance, and they are best exemplified in the life of the Prophet Mohammed himself. A famous story from his life is known to Muslims around the world. One of his enemies was a woman who lived above a street he used to pass daily, and would litter the streets with garbage as he walked past. One morning, when the Prophet was walking by, he noticed no such provocation. His response to this sudden reprieve was to ask after the woman's health, concerned that she had strayed from her daily routine, as painful as it might have been for himself. The stories of the Prophet's praying for his enemies, and exhibiting enormous steadfastness in the face of insults and provocations, are legion in Islamic literature.

This should be the Muslim ideal, there is no doubt. Unfortunately, it is not possible that everyone can live up to the ideal. What is clear is that people's attachment to the personage of the Prophet is undiminished, even when they are unable for their own reasons to live up to the lessons he has taught. Insults against the Prophet are taken as more serious than insults against one's own parents and family, indeed than one's own self. The Prophet is a sacred figure, who taught Muslims how to live in this world, and whose appearance in the world was a gift from the divine. As such, inflammatory materials that are clearly designed to offend the deeply-held sensibilities of over a billion people around the world only contribute to the escalation of tensions with no observable benefit. Muslims should either ignore such provocations, or respond non-violently, as per the limits laid down by their religion. Such limits have been obviously transgressed in recent days, and the broader Muslim religious establishment as well as the Coptic Church in Egypt all joined in calling for calm and not allowing this to further escalate.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=136

<http://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2012/09/57597/defending-the-prophet-attacking-others/>

Dar al Iftaa catches international media attention in its introductory campaign of Prophet Muhammad

Source: Ali-gomaa.com

In its first report after the launch of an international campaign aiming at reintroducing prophet Muhammad to the global eye in the wake of producing the anti-Islam video and cartoons, Dar al-Ifta announces the following: The campaign successfully reached 70 countries over the globe. The campaign markedly attracted the interest of both national and international media to launch similar campaigns aiming to unveil the fabricated nature of such heinous works which are mainly targeted to defame Islam and its Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) before the international community.

In its campaign, Dar al-Ifta was keen to confront “thought with thought” condemning engagement in any sort of tension or violent reactions. This was evidently published on both national and international levels through the Grand Mufti’s press releases which were met with great appeal in different mass and social media. Along with calling for prosecuting the producers of such heinous video and filing law suits against them, the Grand Mufti Dr. Ali Gomaa declared that the introductory campaign about Islam is basically addressed to non-Muslims in the west to give a glimpse on the pure life of the Prophet. This campaign included the publication of numerous articles in leading influential international Journals and magazines.

According to the report, issued by the Dar al-Ifta’s media center, the Washington Post, the most widespread newspaper in America, was the first to publish an article by Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa, titled: “*Prophet Muhammad, mercy for all*”. This article achieved wide acclaim in the western and Arab media. This has prompted many western newspapers and media outlets to republish the article such as “Le Monde” newspaper, the most widespread in French. This was in response to the cartoons published by the French magazine “Charles Hebdo”. This was followed by the republication of the article in Danish official website for Danish television, and in German newspaper “T.Spiegel” in Germany, as well as in the Swiss newspaper “Zontages Zeitung”. The report also mentioned that the Grand Mufti Dr. Ali Gomaa had many interviews with a number of international news agencies including the CNN, Reuters, UN official website and finally the Associated Press (AP) in all of which he asserted the idea of peaceful

coexistence for all humanity. The report likewise announced that the Dar's campaign resulted in launching many initiatives including: establishing an Islamic think-tank under the supervision of the noble Azhar to watch, monitor and analyze any insults targeted to Islam published in media outlets to logically treat them; issuance of a media guide to be distributed among the western journalists and reporters who are assigned to cover the issues in the Muslim world; declaring an international day for supporting the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him); launching and Ad campaign in New York subway to introduce Islam in cooperation with Islamic organizations overthere and finally launching a website in English to introduce Islam and its Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him).

The report mentioned a number of statistics on the influence of the Dar's recently launched campaign which showed that the name of the Dar became known in more than 70 countries worldwide as one of the most important and influential moderate Islamic sources and references. From among these countries are USA, England, Canada, Iran, Ireland, Switzerland and others. Not only this; but also the number of articles and news published about the Dar and Grand Mufti in media in general, in both Arabic and English amounts to 1,034 news reports and articles.

As for social media, the number of "Facebook" users who reacted to the news of the campaign is 500.000, in addition to the wide watching of the Grand Mufti's YouTube videos, which tantamount to 20.000 views since the beginning of the campaign.

Finally, it is declared that the number of visitors of the recently launched official website of Dr. Ali Gomaa www.ali-gomaa.com reached 14.288 visits with 72% of the total number of the website's visitors are new visitors. And 34.688 visitor have browsed it.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=131

Dar al Iftaa launches an international “Mercy for All” introductory campaign in the USA and Europe

Source: Ali-gomaa.com

Dar al Iftaa has finished its preparation for an international campaign titled “Mercy for All” to introduce Prophet Muhammad to non Muslims in both the USA and Europe. The advisor of the Grand Mufti, Dr. Ibrahim Negm, had followed attentively the wave of news and reports that spread across Europe and the USA after the announcement of the production of the defaming movie about Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and it was noted that the belligerent campaigns defaming Prophet Muhammad and Islam were skyrocketing especially after the strong wave of protests sweeping the Muslim world in condemnation of the heinous movie. Some of the western media outlets had unfortunately played rather a negative role during the current crises through stereotyping Muslims as chaos lovers and opponents of free speech which increased the negative consequences of the inflammatory movie.

Dr. Negm explained that the international introductory campaign of Prophet Muhammad will include articles pertinent to Prophet Muhammad’s character and analytical pieces of the raging protests sweeping the Muslim world and will be published in international widely circulated journals. Also the campaign will include an electronic booklet about the Prophet’s value in the hearts of Muslims and the reasons behind this utmost reverence and utter love that the Prophet enjoys along with glimpses of the Prophet’s life which is filled with mercy.

Finally the campaign will include fine English translation to some of the important prophetic teachings along with the full transcript of the “Last Sermon” of the Prophet which was given right before his death when he conducted his last pilgrimage in Makkah. This sermon was considered the first declaration of human rights as it asserted the principles of mercy and humanity and laid the foundations for peace and harmony by prohibiting bloodshed and looting money. During this sermon, the Prophet established the bases for love and compassion among people and paid attention to the issue of women’s rights along with emphasizing equality among all people.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=115

We are not instigating violence and we reserve the right to object to the defaming movie

Source: Ali-Gomaa.com

Jytte Klausen insinuates that the Mufti of Egypt, Ali Gomaa, was the instigator of the violent rioting that has engulfed the Middle East, including Egypt, over the past few days. This is a rather odd reading of an episode that has occupied our minds with concern since we became aware of the existence of a film depicting the Prophet in the vilest terms imaginable. These sorts of blatant insults towards the Prophet cannot be taken lightly by any Muslim, and we reserve the right to object to, and peacefully protest, such attempts at offending the deeply-held sensibilities of over a billion people around the world. There is no doubt that the religious establishment in Egypt has been facing serious institutional challenges in the current transitional period. However, Klausen's depiction of the religious scene in Egypt betrays a serious misunderstanding the current state of both Egyptian politics and Muslim authority. For his part, Dr Gomaa has been a staunch opponent of all sorts of violence, and has repeatedly condemned efforts to disturb the peaceful, harmonious nature of Egyptian society. Furthermore, he has a recognized track record of working with people of all faiths in order to foster respect and understanding. Indeed, in the Danish cartoons affair, was at the forefront in calling for dialogue between Islam and the West, so as to calm tensions and create forums interested in participating in a respectful give-and-take of opinions and concerns. More recently, the Mufti has gone on record to condemn the violence in Libya, including the destruction of shrines and mosques dear to Muslims all over the world.

Indeed, Dr Gomaa's goal is to cultivate relationships with others so that we may, as the Qur'an says, "*understand one another.*" It is precisely insensitive and unrestrained films like these which contribute to the escalation of tensions and inflame religious sentiment and sectarianism. Rather than engage in baseless rhetoric seeking to point the finger at figures who have spent their careers seeking to achieve inter-faith and inter-civilizational understanding, we would be much better served by being proactive in strengthening these personalities and institutions who are genuinely interested in creating a better world for all. It is this sort of cooperation that is sorely needed to confront the crises that seem to arise far too often these days.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=114

Ali Gomaa to the AP: “Hatred is not cured with hatred. We can’t stop loving Prophet Muhammad”

Source: Ali-gomaa.com

The Associated Press news agency (AP) conducted a timely interview with the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Sheikh Ali Gomaa, discussing the debatable issue of freedom of expression versus hate speech along with other sensitive issues pertinent to the right of Muslims to get angry and the legitimate ways of expressing their discontent with the desecration of Islamic figures and sanctities.

The Grand Mufti asserted in his interview that “spreading hatred, wars, killings and bloodshed will not lead humanity to a better course and only through disseminating a culture of peace, love, coexistence and dialogue we would be able to build a modern human civilization that is based on justice and dignity for all.”

Sheikh Ali Gomaa called the Western world to criminalize hate speech and activate the existing laws pertinent to fighting discrimination and desecration of religions along with laws that are enacted to prevent acts of insults and denigration of sanctities and religious symbols. He said in this regard about people who spread hate *“by your denigration of religions, you aim at spreading hate and the issue is not about that you don’t believe in what I believe. The issue is that we both live in one global society and in the same neighborhood and one of the fundamental rights of neighbors is not to be subjected to insults”*.

He also pointed out to the importance of endorsing the numerous proposed initiatives to the UN aiming at halting attempts of denigrating religions and turning these initiatives into encoded binding laws signed by all UN member countries in order to achieve world peace.

Answering an AP question regarding the stereotypical image of Islam in the West and the underlying reasons for it, the Grand Mufti emphasized on the vitality of comprehending Islam through its legal authentic sources and well versed erudite religious scholars and not through reckless individual acts. He also added that “part of the process of justice is that the Western media not to get swayed with a minority of irresponsible acts and generalize it to encompass all the Muslim world who stands firmly against any acts of violence or bloodshed and is known for its moderate discourse”.

The Grand Mufti took the opportunity and sent an SOS message to world leaders who are assembling in the United Nations in its 67th general assembly saying "*please act quickly to build a better future full of optimism. Let's clear the earth from all nuclear weapons and rising hatred so we can live peacefully loving both God and our neighbors*". Sheikh Ali Gomaa asserted that Muslims from their part should follow Prophet Muhammad as he was a role model of sewing love in the hearts of people.

Sheikh Ali further explained the urgency of eliminating hate and discrimination by emphasizing the need to shift our priorities to more urgent matters in this world like for example developing human beings who most of them suffer from lack of education, extreme poverty and dangerous diseases. He cited an example saying "*can you imagine that more than 42% of people worldwide have no accessibility to pure water or proper sewers? Is this something comprehensible in the 21st century?*". He also pointed out to other obvious unresolved problems pertinent to the rights of women and children along with accumulating environmental issues which need world attention.

The Grand Mufti reiterated that Muslims are still concerned about this incomprehensible rising wave of hatred against Islam which this time aimed at inciting sectarianism among Egyptians but their attempt failed miserably as the Coptic church fathers were the first to condemn the denigrating movie and asserted their long standing stance of respect and appreciation to Islam and its Prophet.

The Grand Mufti expressed the love feelings of the Muslim world towards their Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) by saying "*No one can control the love of Muslims to their beloved Prophet Muhammad*" and that the world needs to understand the special relationship that Muslims have with their Prophet. He added that Muslims have always been patient against myriad attempts of desecrating Islam and denigrating its Prophet. For example he explained that only in London more than 1700 novels were written against Islam since 1970. This means that around one novel every 10 days is published to denigrate Islam. Sheikh Ali Gomaa commented on these facts by saying that "*hated is not cured with hatred*" and that he vehemently condemned all acts of killing innocents, burning flags, setting the bible on fire under any reason.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa ended his interview with the AP by suggesting a unique solution for the current attempts of defaming Prophet Muhammad. He said "*let's go out in peaceful protests and conduct sessions of invoking peace and blessings on our beloved Prophet Muhammad and channel this anger through crying in love and awe for our Prophet to display to the world who this man really was and what he means to all Muslims.*" These love sessions would be the best reply to this wave of hatred against Islam and would beg questions in the mind of non Muslims about the man who taught his people how to respond to hatred with love.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=127

Sunni Islam leader calls for peace, urges Muslims to have 'patience and wisdom'

From Ian Lee, CNN

September 23, 2012

Source: CNN

Cairo (CNN) -- A leading figure in the Sunni Islam world called for fellow believers to respond to recent controversial portrayals of Mohammed -- which he said "*spread hatred*" -- just like the prophet himself would, "through patience and wisdom."

The Grand Mufti of Egypt Ali Gomaa spoke to CNN as Muslims staged yet more passionate protests Saturday in yet more locales, from Germany to Lebanon to Bangladesh, as they have since September 11. Demonstrators railed against an obscure, 14-minute trailer for a film that mocks Mohammed as a womanizer, child molester and killer -- as well as the country in which it was privately produced, the United States -- and more recently a French satirical magazine's cartoons of a figure representing Mohammed.

Egypt's grand mufti questioned whether in the United States, for example, the inflammatory film "*Innocence of Muslims*" was not illegal under laws prohibiting the spread of hatred. And he also challenged if laws protecting freedom of speech were applicable.

"This is not freedom of speech, this is an attack on humanity, (an) attack on religions, and (an) attack on human rights," he said. At the same time, the North African nation's grand mufti -- a figure appointed by Egypt's government whose pronouncements often hold significant sway in the Muslim world -- stressed conflict is not the answer, saying, "*We live together and must respect our neighbors.*" "*These cartoons spread hatred, and we call for peace,*" he said, adding that Islamic leaders "*fear the spread of hatred*" against their religion and oppose "*the mocking*" of any religion. Noting Egypt-based Coptic Church bishops had condemned the film that sparked protests, Egypt's grand mufti -- who noted he's active in the Coexist Foundation, which promotes religious tolerance -- urged an end to the cycle of different groups attacking each other. And in Egypt, at least, he vowed Muslims and Christians will continue to peacefully coexist despite the recent turmoil.

"My message to those who want (strife) between Muslims and Christians in Egypt, I tell them, 'You will not succeed, because we are one people that have been living together for more than 1,400 years,'" he said.

More Muslims protest inflammatory film, cartoons The trailer for "Innocence of Muslims" was posted online to YouTube in July, but it wasn't until earlier this month that it gained attention in the Muslim world and stirred tens of thousands of protest in more than 20 nations. While most of these demonstrations have been peaceful, a number have been marred by violence that has left more than two dozen people dead -- among them U.S. Ambassador to Libya Chris Stevens and three other Americans killed in an attack on the consulate in Benghazi, Libya.

And there were more protests Saturday, in which Muslims once again derided the film and, in many cases, the United States. Among them: -- Thousands of Shiite Muslims protested in the Nigerian city of Kano, with the crowd shouting "God is great" and "Death to America," resident Sani Isa Mohammed told CNN. There were no immediate reports of violence, according to a police officer said. *"The imam called us to join in the call to damn the evil film from America which insulted the prophet and we joined in the march,"* Mohammed said. *"We chanted and shouted. My voice is hoarse from screaming!"* -- Protests in Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka, turned violent as police fired tear gas and used clubs to disperse the crowd, which included some wielding sticks and flinging chunks of bricks, police and witnesses said. Demonstrators in the South Asian nation -- which has one of the world's largest Muslim populations -- torched a police van and damaged police cars, and several protesters and protest leaders were arrested, the spokesman said. Activists called a countrywide general strike for Sunday in protest of a government ban issued Friday on any kind of gatherings and rallies in downtown Purana Paltan, centering the national mosque. Benazir Ahmed, chief of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, defended a ban that he said was imposed to maintain law and order.

-- Hundreds took to the streets of Dortmund, Germany, chanting and peacefully denouncing what they described as injustices against Islam. One banner, for instance, noted that insulting blacks, Jews or women would be defined as racism, anti-Semitism and sexism, respectively, but questioned why insulting the Muslim Prophet would qualify as freedom of opinion.

-- Thousands carrying Lebanese and Hezbollah flags turned out in Bint Jbeil, in southeastern Lebanon. Prompted by speakers, they chanted anti-American slogans and derided any attempt to defame the Prophet Mohammed. Druze and Christian leaders in the area joined top Muslim figures at the demonstration.

-- A day after at least 27 people were killed and more than 100 injured as mobs ransacked banks, theaters, government offices and a church and clashed with security forces, at least 3,500 female students of Islamabad's Lal Masjid, or Red Mosque, protested the film. The women and girls wore headbands on top of their burqas as they marched through Islamabad's streets, carrying placards saying "*America is the biggest terrorist*" and "*Say NO to American products,*" mosque spokesman Abdul Qadir told CNN. "*We will respond to this insult whether we are men or women,*" they chanted.

American diplomatic official summoned in Pakistan

Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, meanwhile, summoned U.S. chargés d'affaires Ambassador Richard Hoagland on Friday to demand the United States remove the controversial movie from YouTube. Islamabad -- which had declared a "national holiday" to protest the film -- has blocked the site in recent days.

According to a statement, the ministry lodged a protest with Hoagland over the movie, describing it as "a premeditated and a malicious act to spread hatred and violence among people of different faiths." Hoagland reiterated the Obama administration's repeated condemnation of the movie and its message, emphasizing that the United States government had nothing to do with it.

"Ambassador Hoagland stated that this act was a deeply insensitive decision by a single individual to disseminate hatred," according to a statement released by the U.S. Embassy. "It does not reflect the values of the United States, a nation of more than 300 million people, built upon the pillars of religious freedom and tolerance." The U.S. mission in Lahore, Pakistan, on Saturday extended the temporary suspension of services amid news of two planned protests that were expected to draw hundreds, according to a U.S. State Department security announcement.

Washington launches TV, social media campaign

The United States has been trying to stem anger in Pakistan through television advertisements and a Facebook campaign.

The U.S. State Department spent \$70,000 on television public service announcements that began airing last week in Pakistan. The ads feature Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton disavowing the anti-Islam video.

On the Facebook page of the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, officials posted a video of two Americans speaking out against the film, but that has drawn overwhelmingly negative responses.

“If America (does) not have any concern with this film then why (is) their government not taking any action against this act? Why there is no law (to) protect the religious (beliefs) of Muslims?” read a Facebook post by someone identified as Numra Sheikh.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2012/09/22/world/world-film-protests/index.html?iref=allsearch>

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=121

UN Alliance interviewing Sheikh Ali Gomaa on the current rise of hate speech against Islam

Source: United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

Ali Gomaa is the Grand Mufti of Egypt and a prolific author and writer on Islamic issues. He writes a weekly column in the Egyptian al-Ahram newspaper in which he discusses matters of current interest and religion.

He spoke to Global Experts exclusively on the current crisis in the Middle East and what national leaders, international leaders and civilians alike need to do to improve the situation in the region.

Q: In your view, what is the genesis of the current crisis? The immediate cause of course is clear: an offending video was placed on the Internet, and since then people have protested, sometimes in more violent ways than others. But why do tensions between the Muslim world and the West persist? Why is it possible for one marginal person who represents nobody to come out, make a video that is humiliating, and for protests and violence to erupt on such a large scale?

A: The current crisis has been precipitated by numerous factors; there is no one single cause to which we can point. Rather, this is a complex matter involving the fundamental inability of each side to understand the paradigm of the other. As you mention, the particulars of this case have been rehearsed many times in the past week, but the underlying causes are deeper, and, unfortunately, cannot simply be wished away.

Q: Is it an absence of responsible leadership that is causing this; is it because leaders in some part of the world are exploiting the situation to rouse people and strengthen themselves? Is it because there is already a lot of tension vis-à-vis the West as well as insecurity at the individual level in the Arab region, and people are looking for a way to vent or externalize their anxieties?

A: To properly understand this matter it is important to look seriously at the politics that pertain to Islam and the West at this particular point in history. It is naive to point at a particular film, cartoon, or writing made by marginal figures in an attempt to provoke and insult Muslims as the cause of these conflagrations. Rather, one must keep in

mind the many points of conflict and tensions between the Muslim world and the West today: grave violations associated with the war in Iraq, regular drone attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the conflict that has persisted for decades in Palestine. More recently we have witnessed attempts to marginalize Muslims in Europe by banning headscarves, minarets and other religious symbols, while far-right European political parties consistently demonize their Muslim populations, casting them as unwelcome intrusions. To turn a blind eye to these serious and enduring conflicts is to remain oblivious of the underlying factors that make coexistence and rapprochement between Islam and the West so difficult.

Q: Some scholars have pointed to how the Prophet himself behaved when others insulted him: most often by letting things go and being forgiving. From your perspective, what is the Islamic point of view when something like this happens, especially given how easy it is to exploit people by simply posting an offending video on the Internet? How should a Muslim react to something like this?

A: Of all Muslim symbols, there is perhaps none more sacred than the Prophet Muhammad himself. Muslims barely utter his name before their conscience obliges them to pray for God to bless him and grant him peace. Hundreds of millions of Muslims revere not only the Prophet, but also the city of Madina, which he made his home, and aspire to visit it at the first opportunity. Islamic history is filled with poetry expressing Muslims' love and devotion for the Prophet. Children are taught to consider him their ultimate example, for his beautiful character, resolute determination, persistent sacrifice, and unwavering devotion. It is no exaggeration to say that Muslims love the Prophet more than their selves. Therefore, crude representations of the Prophet not only translate as a great insult, but ignites the already simmering tensions alluded to above.

Unfortunately each side considers themselves to be firmly in the right, and unwilling to hear the grievances of the other side. As a representative of the Muslim world, I would consider myself remiss if I did not therefore clarify the sensibilities and sentiments of the Muslim world for the many well-meaning non-Muslims in the world who desire peaceful coexistence and an amelioration of our current crises. In order to make any progress, the first step must be to listen to each other with a sincere and open heart. It will not do to simply claim, for

example, that specific standards of free speech must be applicable to all, and then to impose this understanding on all other societies. Muslims do indeed value free speech, but we also recognize hate speech. Speech and dialogue are specific tools of communications and not purposeless. With them, we aim to achieve a greater understanding of both others and ourselves. Insulting a revered figure like the Prophet of Islam does not lead to a greater understanding, but leads to more scorn and ill feelings.

None of this is meant to condone violence of any sort. Indeed, the example of the Prophet was to endure the worst of insults. Not only was his message routinely rejected, but also he was chased out of his hometown, cursed at, and physically assaulted on numerous occasions. His example was to always endure all personal insults and attacks. There is no doubt that he was the most steadfast in his faith and in following the advice of God, and since the Prophet is our greatest example in this life, this should also be the reaction of all Muslims. As the Qur'an instructs, "*Be patient, as were the great prophets.*"

Q: Given what has already happened, what do you think needs to happen next? What do each of world leaders, religious leaders, responsible citizens, the media, and young people need to do to change the situation?

A: Muslim leaders have a duty to object to hate speech (aimed at any group) in the most peaceful of ways, and must unequivocally denounce violence of any sort. It is equally important to point out that some self-appointed religious leaders have failed to act responsibly. In the tense environment that currently prevails in the Muslim world, to air these provocations openly and to speculate on the supposed conspiracies behind them is to act recklessly. Unfortunately, the proliferation of satellite channels and other types of media platforms have opened the door to all sorts of people who have only their own material interests and popularity in mind, not the wellbeing of any of the Muslim nation, the Middle East, nor the world at large. This, unfortunately, is a serious failure in leadership that must be addressed. A genuine religious leader has the responsibility to act as a sensible and measured guide for people, shepherding them towards the better course of action. Misguided figures use incidents like this recent one as cover for their own sinister designs. This is another reason why media outlets need to exercise responsibility with respect to what they

publish. Despite all of this there is room for hope and optimism. While this current situation has been particularly challenging, our actions should come with the firm belief that the world's religions are ultimately interested in achieving harmony between peoples. Throughout my tenure as Mufti of Egypt, I have called for strengthening the bonds between the world's great faiths. In this context, I have been involved in a number of forums devoted to building bridges of understanding. The virtue of these forums is that they quickly allow each side to appreciate the other's positions. This is a model that applies not only to religious leaders who have been at the forefront of such initiatives. Both political leaders and media outlets must look beyond their short-term benefits and take seriously their responsibility to the outside world.

Q: Are you worried about tensions between Copts and Muslims in Egypt, as fallout from this crisis? Have you spoken domestically about this following the crisis? What are you doing already at a domestic, regional, and international level to address these tensions?

A: With regards to your question about Egypt, I am pleased to say that the official Muslim institutions in the country enjoy warm relations with the Coptic Church. Just as there are radical individuals within Muslim societies, there are extreme figures in the Christian world. Muslims are obligated to consider these people as marginal and unrepresentative of the Christian faith, just as we expect others to do when it comes to us. Many outside of Egypt fear that these incidents will be used as an opportunity to divide Muslim Egyptians from Coptic Egyptians. This is not possible. We denounce in the strongest terms any acts of sectarianism that occurs on our soil. We are always ready to cooperate with all willing parties to diminish the fears of sectarianism, and assert with a unified voice that Muslims and Christians are equal partners in building the country we share as citizens.

<http://www.unaoc.org/2012/09/commentary-on-the-recent-crisis/>

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=120

Chapter 7: Women Issues

Key positions:

- The history of Islam had not itself been previously confronted with what is now called “women’s issues”. This has been so despite the great diversity in customs and cultures among Muslims over the centuries.
- Islam is a religion which recognizes the equal status of men and women in the eyes of God, as is attested by numerous passages in the Holy Qur'an. The most fundamental aspect of this status is the unity of the human spirit in which both genders share.
- The spiritual equality of men and women is clear in matters of religious worship, considering solely the sincerity of their acts of worship and piety. Instead of paying any attention to the gender (or ethnicity or class) of the worshipper, God has made the standard for acceptance of one's worship based on the degree of reverence, sincerity, and purity of heart exhibited by the worshipper.
- Following from the spiritual and legal equality is the equity envisioned by Islam in the social relations between men and women. Socially, the relationship between them is one of complementarity, and not of competition.
- Prophet Muhammad was to express his outrage and denunciation at the pre-Islamic Arab customs surrounding newborn girls, customs which saw them as less than human and a source of embarrassment to the family.
- One of the highest values of Islamic law is the Prophetic command to neither inflict nor accept harm. Thus due to the significant physical and psychological harm to young girls (and later women) caused by FGM, all measures must be taken to put a halt to this unacceptable tradition.
- Islam has never restricted women's roles in society to some domains at the expense of others. A woman was the first to accept the message of the Prophet. The first martyr in the cause of Islam was a woman, as was the first emigrant (muhajir). And women have

continued to occupy lofty positions throughout the centuries: they have been rulers, judges, warriors, teachers, muftis, etc.

- Islam has granted equal rights to men and woman in choosing their spouses. Because an Islamic marriage is valid and legitimate only if there is genuine consent on the part of both husband and wife, parents (and all other parties) are prohibited from forcing their children into unwanted marriages.

Book: The Epistemology of Excellence: A Journey into the Life and Thoughts of the Grand Mufti of Egypt

Source: Chapter 5 on Women Issues

As a religious leader with a sensitivity to both the intellectual debates of the time as well as the circumstances of the Muslim community, Sheikh Ali Gomaa has long taken an interest in the questions raised with respect to Islam and women, publishing a number of fatwa collections exclusively devoted to the topic, addressing contemporary matters in public lectures and study circles, and convening seminars to investigate how better to advance women's rights.

This has in response to the realization that modern Western concepts have begun to have great impact on Muslim societies, and in particular doubts about the status of women within the Islamic worldview had begun to proliferate. The history of Islam had not itself been previously confronted with what is now called "women's issues". This has been so despite the great diversity in customs and cultures among Muslims over the centuries. As a result of their encounter with the West, however, and its particular history during the Dark Ages, calls began to be heard about liberating women. Though these have found their way into the discourse of those living in Muslim societies, the truth is that the Muslim woman has been liberated for centuries under Islamic rule. What is striking in this new discourse, according to the Grand Mufti, is the way in which it puts women against men in a continuous struggle and state of competition. Islam, however, is a religion which recognizes the equal status of men and women in the eyes of God, as is attested by numerous passages in the Holy Qur'an.

The most fundamental aspect of this status is the unity of the human spirit in which both genders share. As Allah says, "*O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty toward Allah in Whom ye claim (your rights) of one another, and toward the wombs (that bare you).*"

(Al-Nisa':1) Similarly, He has made clear on more than one occasion the spiritual equality of men and women in matters of religious worship, considering solely the sincerity of their acts of worship and piety. Instead of paying any attention to the gender (or ethnicity or class) of the worshipper, Allah has made the standard for acceptance of one's worship based on the degree of reverence, sincerity, and purity of

heart exhibited by the worshipper. As He says in his Holy Book, “*O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware.*” (Al-Hujuraat: 13). Indeed, it may be said that not only are the genders equal in their servitude to the Almighty, but indeed all of creation presents itself before Him as simply a servant: “*There is nothing in the heavens and the earth but that it will come to the All-Merciful as a servant.*” (Maryam: 93). The matter is no different in terms of legal obligations, and the rewards and punishments that accrue from those obligations, as is clearly stated in the following verse:

“*He that works evil will not be requited but by the like thereof: and he that works a righteous deed - whether man or woman - and is a Believer- such will enter the Garden (of Bliss): Therein will they have abundance without measure.*” (Ghafir: 40). The very structure of legality in the Sharī’ah is based on a reciprocity which recognizes the importance of according equality to women. As the Qur'an says “*And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable.*” (Al-Baqarah: 228).

The fundamental principle is that they are both honored members of creation possessing equality with respect to spirituality and worship, Following from this spiritual and legal equality is the equity envisioned by Islam in the social relations between men and women. Socially, the relationship between them is one of complementarity, and not of competition. As the Qur'an says, “*And in no wise covet those things in which Allah Hath bestowed His gifts More freely on some of you than on others: To men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn: But ask Allah of His bounty.*” (Al-Nisa: 32). From this follows, the concept of social equity, and not identity. This standpoint maintains the distinction between men as men, and women as women, a distinction which has come under attack from some materialist philosophies. Each of the genders fulfills their roles in life, in accordance with their natural specificities and responsibilities. The extent to which the Islamic worldview on male-female relations constitutes a remarkable breakthrough can only be appreciated against the background of the pre-Islamic customs practiced by the Arabs. Describing these customs, the Qur'an castigates this state of affairs in the strongest possible terms: “*When news is brought to one of them, of (the birth of) a female (child), his face darkens, and he is filled with inward grief! With shame does*

he hide himself from his people, because of the bad news he has had! Shall he retain it on (sufferance and) contempt, or bury it in the dust? Ah! what an evil (choice) they decide on?" (Al-Nahl: 58-59). Indeed, Allah warns the reader of the position on the Day of Judgment of one who commits such infanticide, the day "*when the female (infant), buried alive, is questioned - For what crime she was killed.*" (Al-Takwir: 8-9) . In place of the shame and embarrassment regularly occasioned by the birth of a baby girl, then, the Prophet of Islam came with a message to expressly state that, "*Women are the sisters of men.*" (Sunan Abu Dawud, Sunan Tirmidhi).

Unfortunately, it has become common to think of Islam as precisely the means by which women are oppressed, whereas it is obvious to any clear-minded historian that the place of women in the medieval period was much stronger in the Islamic world than it was in the Western world. There are now, however, a number of allegations leveled against Islamic thought, culture and civilization with regards to particular women's issues. As we have seen above, the Islamic worldview is based closely on a conception of male-female relations with stresses the importance of women, and values their contributions to society. It is then not surprising that the particularities of Islamic law reflect this status accorded to women, and in fact honor them for their particularities and specificities. This is the basis for a healthy family arrangement: one in which roles and responsibilities are well understood, and antagonism between the sexes is not seen as a natural state of affairs, but rather a divergence from the ideal which both sides must work towards minimizing and overcoming. This reflects a deep equality and harmony between the sexes which is not accounted for when one focuses on superficial expressions of sameness or identity.

In an effort, however, to clarify the Islamic worldview and dispel a number of misconceptions surrounding Islam's position on women, the remainder of this chapter takes up the positions of the Grand Mufti on common objections leveled against Islam.

Female Genital Mutilation

The distinguishing characteristic of mankind, according to the Qur'an, is the dignity bestowed upon it by God: "*We have dignified the children of Adam ... and favored them over much of creation.*" Human dignity is, therefore, a fundamental tenet of the Islamic worldview. It should be no surprise, then, that Islam's emergence and presence in

the world has been one which has placed a very high regard on the protection of human rights. This concern is heightened considerably when one turns to the most vulnerable members of society. Indeed, one of the first missions of the Prophet Muhammad was to express his outrage and denunciation at the pre-Islamic Arab customs surrounding newborn girls, customs which saw them as less than human and a source of embarrassment to the family.

These are long-standing and unshakeable principles which are representative of the enduring spirit of Islam. It is crucial, therefore, that at this stage in our historical development, they be understood within the context of modern social conditions and the state of scientific knowledge today. With this in mind, Dār al- Iftāa convened an international conference in November 2006 on the topic of female genital mutilation (FGM). Participants included scientists, scholars of Islamic law, specialist researchers on the topic, and activists from civil rights organizations in Egypt and around the world. Upon hearing an array of presentations from across the spectrum, the conference concluded that the mutilation practiced in some parts of Egypt, Africa and elsewhere today represents a deplorable custom which finds no justification in the authoritative sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the practice of the Prophet Muhammad.

One of the highest values of Islamic law is the Prophetic command to neither inflict nor accept harm. This imperative will be familiar to non-Muslims as the golden rule. A universal commandment that applies to all, irrespective of social class or gender, special care must be taken to ensure that no type of harm befalls those who can neither cause nor repel harm on their own, the weak and helpless in our societies. In light of this reality, and because of the significant physical and psychological harm to young girls (and later women) caused by FGM, all measures must be taken to put a halt to this unacceptable tradition. Thus, one of the recommendations of the conference was that taking active action on this front is crucial if we are to remain true to our Islamic values and principles. Islam is a religion of knowledge, learning and research. While it was previously practiced as a social custom (and not a religious matter), the state of today's knowledge makes clear the serious negative effects on women of such practices. As such, it becomes a religious obligation to say unequivocally that the practice of FGM is today forbidden in Islam.

The findings of the conference represented a call to the peoples of the Muslim world – in Egypt and beyond – to hold fast to their Islamic identity by ending this deplorable custom in their communities. Injuring oneself or another in any form is expressly and categorically forbidden. In connection with this, it is enough for us to quote the example of our Beloved Prophet – the Mercy to all Mankind – who never subjected any of his daughters to this practice.

The conference opined that true eradication of FGM depends heavily on the cooperation of international and religious institutions to concentrate their efforts on educating and instructing their populations on this matter in accordance with the Islamic prohibition against harm. In addition to the Islamic legal position outlined above, special attention must be given to raising basic awareness of female hygiene and medicine. Educational establishments and media, for their part, have a duty to educate people about the devastating consequences of this practice on those who are subject to it, as well as on society at large. In addition, legislative organs in the countries of the Muslim world ought to take decisive action by passing laws which ban the practice of this gruesome custom, declaring it a crime once and for all. Both the actual perpetrators as well as the initiators of instances of FGM must be subject to the full punitive extent of the law in view of the seriousness of the crime against society's most vulnerable members. International institutions and organizations are encouraged to provide help in all regions to facilitate its elimination.

Islam is, without doubt, a religion that adapts and develops to the changing conditions of the world, and the state of scientific knowledge. The enduring commitment to human rights and dignity demand action on our part towards the eradication of FGM.

Women as Heads of State

Islam has never restricted women's roles in society to some domains at the expense of others. A woman was the first to accept the message of the Prophet (May God shower His peace and blessings upon him). The first martyr in the cause of Islam was a woman, as was the first emigrant (muhajir). And women have continued to occupy lofty positions throughout the centuries: they have been rulers, judges, warriors, teachers, muftis, etc. Any honest student of Islamic history can testify to this.

As for being a head of state, there is one hadith that has alluded to the impermissibility of this, suggesting that people who appoint a woman as their leader will not prosper. However, Islamic history has seen more than fifty examples of female rulers throughout different time periods and empires, such as Sitt al-Mulk in Egypt, Queens Asma' and Arwa in Sana, Zaynab al-Nafzawiya in al-Andalus, Sultana Radia in Delhi, Shajarat al-Durr in Egypt and Syria, Aisha al-Hurra in al-Andalus, just to name a few. This is no doubt a consequence of the Prophet's affirmation of women's participation in public life, wars, learning institutions, the police (hisba), and the marketplace.

Because of the aforementioned hadith, many jurists have maintained the impermissibility of a female head of state or judge. The Hanafi school maintained the permissibility of a female judge in restricted contexts. However, some have opined that it is entirely permissible for a woman to be either a judge or a head of state. Among these are Ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī, Ibn hazm al-Zahiri, Abu al-Fath ibn Tarar, Ibn al-Qasim, and one narration from Imam Malik. It is important to keep in mind that this hadith was a response to a particular context and circumstance, namely the case of the Persians who had appointed a woman as their leader as a last resort. The Prophetic hadith therefore is to be taken not as a prescription, but rather as an indication of the Persian's waning fortunes. The principles of jurisprudence are clear that particular circumstances do not establish generality. Furthermore, Allah Himself relates the story of Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba in the Qur'an, extolling her competence and sagacity.

It also bears noting that there is a significant difference between the lofty position of Caliph of Islam and simply the head of a contemporary state. The Caliphate is a religious post, whose duties include leading the believers in prayer, and which is subject to strict conditions mentioned by the jurists. However, the head of state is a civil position, with no pretensions to the leadership of all Muslims. Therefore, a woman has every right to occupy this position.

The right of a woman to choose her husband

Islam has granted equal rights to men and woman in choosing their spouses. Because an Islamic marriage is valid and legitimate only if there is genuine consent on the part of both husband and wife, parents (and all other parties) are prohibited from forcing their children into

unwanted marriages. Their role and responsibility is limited to that of giving advice and guidance. A woman has complete freedom to accept or reject any proposal presented to her. The final decision to marry rests with her. The wisdom behind this is the low likelihood that a healthy family life will result when a marriage is conducted under duress, for this is an obstacle to what Allah demands of both spouses in their lives together: that is, that they foster mercy and compassion towards one another.

This position is attested to by numerous textual proofs. Al-Nisa'i records that a man married off his daughter to a man she disliked. So the daughter came to the Prophet (the peace and blessings of God be upon him) and said, "*What if my father married me off to a man while I disliked this, and my cousin came to ask for my hand?*" The Prophet responded, "*There is no marriage [to the first man]. Marry whom you wish.*" Similarly, al-Nisa'i relates on the authority of Khansa' bint Khadham that she said, "*My father married me off against my will while I was a virgin, so I complained to the Prophet, and he said, 'Do not marry her off against her will.'*"

Right to Divorce

Just as Islam gives women the right to choose her husband, it gives her the option to break off a marriage if matters worsen between them and there is no possibility of reconciliation. One of the erroneous conceptions about Islam is that men alone are given the prerogative to end a marriage. However, this is simply not true. This prerogative may be also had by the woman in several guises. For one, she has complete freedom to stipulate into her marriage contract the right to divorce, and act upon that agreement should differences between the two become irreconcilable. In such a case, she retains her full complement of related rights just as a man would if he divorced her. Secondly, she may request an official separation from him on the basis of serious harm. If this turns out to be true, an Islamic judge may affect a separation between the spouses. In this case, too, she will be entitled to her full complement of related rights. Finally, she may also initiate a khul' divorce. In this case alone she will be entitled to a separation, but not some of the financial and other rights specified in the marriage contract, because of the lack of a demonstrable reason for ending the marriage. Because she has initiated the proceedings, she will have to forfeit some of her entitlements.

Domestic Violence

In a modern society in which a woman has access to education, and plays a crucial role in building and maintaining society, clinging to old-fashioned notions about disciplining women via violence does not make sense. Whereas this may have been customary in previous eras, using even minimal force is considered a violation and transgression. It is strongly recommended, therefore, that Muslim men today resort to other options to advise and correct their wives when familial discord occurs. As is mentioned in the Qur'anic verse, Allah asks the believers to advise them with good words, or to separate themselves from their wives sexually. Refraining from any sort of striking is closer to the meaning of Allah in this verse and in this context.

Even earlier jurists, in accordance with their understanding that the Qur'anic verse in question considered any sort of hitting as an absolute last resort after other measures had been exhausted, discouraged striking and severely restricted it. In our context, however, we may go farther and say it is entirely inappropriate. As with all matters, the Prophetic example is our ideal and our guide. When the women at the time of the Prophet found themselves being struck by their men, they went to him complaining about this. The Prophet became angry with his male Companions and insisted that they stop. The sunna of the Noble Prophet, therefore, is not only to refrain from such behavior, but indeed to urge others to stop and to discourage them from it.

Polygamy

The subject of polygamy is regularly pointed to in an effort to demonstrate the failings of Islam and its lack of respect for women. In order to correct these misconceptions, it is necessary to point out that Islam did not invent polygamy but rather put limits on this custom that long predated the Message of the Prophet. Polygamy was common in the ancient world, but was mostly practiced without guidelines or limitations. The Shari'ah circumscribed and legitimized this practice. Such legislation reveals the inventiveness of the Islamic legal system. For example, on the authority of his father, Salim narrates that Ghaylan ibn Salama al-Thaqafi had ten wives when he converted to Islam. The Messenger of God [s] told him, "*Choose four from amongst them to keep.*" The primary texts discussing polygamy are of this nature, meaning they limit the number of wives to four.

There are no texts, however, commanding a man to marry more than one woman. Therefore, in Islam polygamy is not sought out without good reason. It is sought out for specific needs mentioned in conjunction with polygamy. For example, the famous Quranic verse says, “*And if you fear that you will not deal fairly by the orphans, marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three or four; and if you fear that you cannot do justice [to so many] then one [only] or [the captives] that your right hands possess*” (Al-Nisa:3). The exegetes of the Quran say that polygamy occurs in conjunction with situations involving widows and orphans. This meaning is entirely lost when contemporary examiners partially quote the verse and ignore the context of the discussion. The verse specifically speaks of orphans and widows, and uses an “if-then” clause to stress the conditional nature of polygamy. Many contemporary readers miss this; however, the Quran does not openly invite polygamy without conditions attached.

There is a huge difference between Islam commanding the marriage of four wives, as some claim today, and Islam bringing under strict legislation an already common and unfettered practice. If one delves into ancient history, it is common to read of rulers who had hundreds of wives, and of these same rulers giving wives to other rulers as gifts. Similar to Islam, Jewish law permitted men to marry more than one wife. The intention of the Sharī’ah is to examine this practice and insure the marital rights of all spouses. Thus it is strange to hear detractors of Islam targeting polygamy, while ignoring other social phenomena that present a great threat to the unit of the family. Many non-Muslims in Western countries chastise Muslim polygamy, yet their own supposedly monogamous society is ridden with single-parent homes, depression, and high abortion rates. Adultery in the West is a type of polygamy occurring outside the institution of marriage. Both the legal wife and the mistresses of an adulterous man suffer. The man’s entire family suffers, as his acts are a form of treachery and emotional abuse.

Unequal Inheritance

It is commonly stated in contemporary times that Islam oppresses women by making their inheritance half that of men. As Muslims, we have firm conviction in God’s immutable attributes and this conviction keeps such claims from affecting our hearts. We believe that God is a fair judge and that His justice is absolute: no injustice towards

humans or any other creature is found in His sacred law. The Quran says, “*And your Lord wrongs no-one*” (al-Kahf: 49); “*God is no oppressor of His servants*” (al-Hajj:10); and “*It was not for God to wrong them* (al-Ankabut:40). Therefore, such a statement does not shake our conviction, but rather calls for an in-depth analysis of the inheritance law stipulated by the Quran.

The difference in inheritance is not based on the gender of the heir, but on three primary conditions:

1. The degree of kinship to the deceased: Regardless of whether the heir is male or female, the closer the relationship to the deceased, the more an individual will inherit. For example, a deceased woman’s daughter is entitled to half the inheritance while the husband of the deceased only receives one fourth. This is because the daughter, as an immediate blood relative, is closer in relation than the husband. Therefore the amount of inheritance she receives is greater.

2. The generation to which the heir belongs: Grandchildren usually receive more inheritance than grandparents because they will confront future financial responsibilities, whereas others usually maintain the financial upkeep of grandparents. The system functions this way regardless of gender: despite the fact that they are both women, the daughter of the deceased inherits more than the deceased’s mother because they belong to different generations. Likewise, the daughter of the deceased inherits more than the deceased’s father. This is so even if she has a living brother who inherits with her.

3. Financial Responsibility: It is in this category alone that shares of inheritance differ according to gender. However, this disparity causes no injustice to the female. When a group of inheritors, such as the children of the deceased, are equal in the first two aforementioned factors, then their shares are affected by the third. In this specific scenario the misunderstood Quranic verses alluded to in the original question come into play. The Quran has not made the disparity between men and women a general condition, but rather has confined it to this specific situation. When the individuals in a group of heirs are equal in both their relation to the deceased and their age, the male son of the deceased receives twice as much as the female daughter of the deceased. The wisdom behind this arrangement is as follows: the male is responsible for the financial upkeep of his wife and children,

whereas his sister's financial upkeep is the responsibility of an individual other than herself, such as her husband or father. Thus, for all practical purposes, the disparity favors the woman because the wealth she inherits is not applicable to the household expenses and is hers to dispense with as she pleases. This financial advantage also protects her from any circumstances that would place her in financial difficulty. Unfortunately, few today understand this finer point of the Muslim inheritance system.

The financial responsibilities of men include the payment of a dowry, ongoing financial maintenance and support with no expectation of reciprocation, and financial support of their extended family if circumstances demand this. These scenarios, and others, force us to conduct a more objective examination of property and wealth. Wealth is a broader concept than income. Income becomes part of wealth but is not wealth itself, since wealth is that which remains after all expenditure. In the scenarios where a woman receives half of the man's inheritance, the woman's new income is protected by the Shari'ah and is hers to dispense with as she wishes. The man's new income, on the other hand, is to aid him in supporting family members that have now come under his care. This is why we are able to say that Islamic inheritance laws protect the wealth of women and grant preference to them over men.

In other scenarios, men and women inherit the same amount. For example, the children of a deceased women inherit the same amount; as God says, "*And if a man or a woman have a distant heir [having left neither parent nor child], and he [or she] have a brother or a sister [only on the mother's side] then to each of them twain [the brother and the sister] the sixth, and if they be more than two, then they shall be sharers in the third*" (al-Nisa':12). This equality of males and females in this case owes to the fact that they sprung from the same womb but do not share the same father. Sharing the same father would cause the male child to inherit the father's financial responsibilities, to the exclusion of the female child. In the situation explained above, the son does not have those financial burdens so therefore his sister is equally entitled.

Marriage of Minors

A recent troubling trend on the rise in Egypt and elsewhere has been the number of marriages of girls under the age of minority,

in contravention of recent Egyptian laws aimed at protecting children by stipulating that marriages of brides under the age of 18 are not to be solemnized. A number of cases have recently presented themselves of young girls being put on display, so that rich older men may choose from among them for purposes of marriage (often a temporary marriage), the parents of the girls being compensated financially as if this were simply an exchange of commodities. This is a dangerous and troubling phenomenon, betraying the meaning of the Islamic conception of marriage.

Marriage is a sacred institution in Islam, based on love, mercy, and mutual respect. The sorts of arrangements mentioned above fail to live up to these ideals, and worse, compromise the dignity and humanity of young girls, treating them as slaves or chattel to be bought and sold. And this all for the sake of a suspect marriage disguising mere licentiousness, and more often than not leaving the marital rights of the girl unfulfilled. This is not a marriage worthy of the name, but rather a clear case of sexual exploitation which must be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

One of the most basic principles of Islamic law is the Prophetic command to neither inflict nor accept harm. Such deplorable cases not only cause individual harm to the young girl, but inflict harm also on the societal level. Islam has always sought to work for the welfare of the vulnerable and marginalized. When one considers minors, it is noteworthy to point out that the Sharī'ah has given them full legal capacity over their economic assets. And in cases where there has been a legal guardian appointed, he or she is duty-bound to dispose of the minor's wealth only in ways that safeguard and advance the latter's welfare. It is of course evident, therefore, that the minor's welfare should be a primary concern in a matter as serious as marriage, for one's honor is certainly more sacred than one's wealth. The jurists of Islam have long held that the values of love, mercy and mutual respect between the spouses can be best realized through considerations of compatibility between the two spouses. Many of them have deemed compatibility not simply a preference but rather a central value of the sharī'ah to be sought in all cases; indeed, a condition of the validity of an Islamic marriage.

The jurists have agreed that an extreme age difference is an important example of incompatibility. This is no small matter, for a father

that fails to take such incompatibility into account is one who has lost his standing as a trustworthy and upstanding member of the community. And the jurists have stipulated that this standing is a requisite for his legal agency over his young daughter's affairs. There is no doubt that a man who engages in such sexual exploitation, and puts his daughter in such a precarious and dangerous situation, can in no way be considered a legitimate representative looking after her well-being and interests. Rather, he has not even fulfilled the least of his responsibility towards his humanity. As such, he forfeits his right to represent his daughter.

Based on this reasoning, the Mufti's position on this phenomenon has been to call for the criminalization of this sort of behavior, and the punishment of those who partake in it – be they parents of the girl, or intermediaries. Further, we must work to establish the true meaning of an Islamic marriage in our society, and restore the dignity and humanity of all members of our community.

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Question: Does Islam give a father the right to force his daughter to marry someone that she doesn't want to marry? Can a woman end a marriage in Islam or is that solely the right of the man?

Answer: Islam treats men and women equally in regards to the right to choose a mate. It has not given parents the authority to compel them [to marry someone]. The parents' role in marrying off their children is manifested in giving advice, direction, and guidance; they do not have the right to force their children, whether they are sons or daughters, to marry someone they do not want to marry. The final say in this belongs to the children themselves.

Marriage is one of a person's private affairs and it is impermissible for parents to force their daughter to marry someone she does not want to marry since that would be oppression and a transgression on the rights of others. In Islam women have complete freedom to accept or reject whoever comes to propose to them. Neither her father nor her legal guardian has the right to force her to marry someone she does not want, for married life cannot be based on compulsion and coercion which are in contradiction to the love and mercy that God has placed between man and wife.

Many legal texts from our pure tradition indicate this firmly established ruling, and actual events make it clear to all how the Prophet, dealt with a woman and her guardian and challenged all of the norms of the jahiliyah that oppressed women by affirming her right to choose her husband and nullifying the marriage of those who tried to compel her even if that person was her father. We cannot fail to notice the contravention of the traditions of the Arabs at the time that this entailed. This was a test of the believers' hearts to be satisfied with the pure law that honored women and respected their will and choice, while freeing themselves of all the norms that did not value women, disdained, and oppressed them. The prophetic texts that refer to this all affirm this right as in is the saying of the Prophet, "*A widow may not be married until she has been consulted, and a virgin may not be married until her consent has been sought.*"

They said, "O Messenger of God, how does she give consent?" He said, "By remaining silent." Similarly he dealt equitably with girl who came to him complaining that her father had forced her to get married, as is established in his sunna where it is related that, "A young virgin girl came to the Prophet and told him that her father had married her off and that she was averse [to it], so the Prophet gave her the choice [of whether or not to remain married]." It is related that a man married off his daughter who was averse [to the marriage], so she came to the Messenger of God and said something to the affect that her father married her off and she was averse [to the marriage]. Furthermore, she said, "and my cousin was betrothed to me." The Prophet said, "He has no marriage; marry whomsoever you wish."

Khansa' bint Khudham said, "My father married me off, and I was averse [to the marriage], and I was a virgin, so I complained of it to the Prophet who said, "Do not marry her if she is averse [to it]." It is related that there was a woman from among the Ansar who was married to a man from among the Ansar. The man was killed in the Battle of Uhud and he had one son from her. Her son's uncle was betrothed to her so he married her to the man and disregarded her son's uncle. She came to the Prophet and said, "My father married me to a man that I do not want and disregarded my son's uncle, so my son is going to be taken from me." The Prophet called her father and said, "Did you marry so and so to so and so?" He said, "Yes." The Prophet said, "You are the one who has no right to make marriages." [Then he said to the woman,] "Go marry your son's uncle."

Concerning the hadith of the Prophet narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim that says, "Aisha asked the Prophet if a young girl whose family marries her off should be consulted. He said, 'Yes, she should be consulted.' Aisha said, 'But they are shy.' He said, 'If she remains silent, that is her consent.'" Ibn al-Qayyim says, "We adopt this fatwa; a virgin must be consulted [concerning her marriage]. There is an authentic tradition that the Prophet said, 'Widows are more deserving of [deciding for] themselves than their fathers; virgins are consulted concerning themselves, and their consent is their silence.' In one version it reads, 'The virgin's permission is sought by her father, and her permission is her silence.' It is related in al-Bukhari and Muslim that the Prophet said, 'Do not marry off a virgin girl until her permission is sought.' They asked, 'How is her permission [given]?' He replied, 'By remaining silent.' And a young virgin girl told him that her father married her off and

she was averse [to the marriage], so the Prophet gave her the option [whether or not to remain married]. So he enjoined seeking out the consent of the virgin girl, forbade marrying her off without it, and gave an option to whoever had been married without having their permission sought. How then can we leave all of this and go against it?" The attention Islam pays to the issue of choice between a husband and wife is, in reality, a concern for the nucleus of the family. Family begins with a man and a woman who come together with a great deal of mutual understanding that has an affect on the family when it grows and its members increase. Family is the essential building block of society, and upon this sound basis civilizations are established and values are elevated. The words of Ahmed Shawqi, the Egyptian Prince of Poets bears witness to the importance of women in the foundation of Muslim society, "Mothers are schools if you prepared them...then you prepared a great nation". Just as Islam gave women the right to choose their husbands, it also gave them the right to choose whether to remain with them or part from them when relations between them become soured and reconciliation and compromise cannot be reached.

Divorce was incorporated into the law for the benefit of both women and men alike. One of the widespread misconceptions of Islam and its family structure is that men are the only ones who have the right to end a marriage, that they are the only ones who can choose divorce, and that women do not possess this right. The truth, however, is quite different. Islamic law gives women the right to end a marriage just as it gives that right to men. Islamic law allows women to end a marriage in a number of ways: Women have the right to make it a condition [in the initial marital contract] that the authority to pronounce divorce be in her hands, meaning that they can divorce themselves whenever they please. In this case the woman divorces herself and is entitled to all of her rights; it is as if her husband divorced her, so she does not lose any of her rights. She can also request to be separated from her husband due to harm. If the man has inflicted great harm on his wife the judge will separate them and she will be entitled to all of her rights without exception. She can also seek khula'. Only in this case does the woman separate herself from the man, except she waives her rights due to the fact that there is no [external] reason to end the marriage so it would be unfair to impose a fine of these dues on the man while he is still holding fast to the relationship between them.

Many religious texts indicate the free choice of women when it comes to separation from their husbands. An example is that which is related by Ibn Abbas [who said], “*Barira’s husband was a slave called Mughith; it is as if I can see him now following after her weeping, the tears moistening his beard.* The Prophet told Abbas, ‘O Abbas, do you not marvel at the love of Mughith for Barira and the dislike of Barira for Mughith?’ So the Prophet said to her, ‘Would you take him back?’ She said, ‘O Messenger of God, are you commanding me?’ He said, ‘I only intercede.’ She said, ‘I have no need for him.’” When she understood that his words were not a command, but rather advice, she chose to leave him since that was her right after becoming free. The wife of Thabit ibn Qays came to the Prophet and said, “*O Messenger of God, there is none more steadfast than Thabit when it comes to religion and morals, but I do not love him.*” He said, “*Will you return his garden to him?*” She said, “Yes,” and gave him back his garden and his and he separated from her.

This is a brief clarification of the issue of women choosing their husbands and having their desires respected if they want to leave them. According to this it is impermissible for a father, or anyone else for that matter, to force his son or daughter to marry someone they do not like; also women can end marriage in the ways mentioned.

And God is Most high and Knows Best.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=fatwas&fatwa_details=34

Chapter 8: Islam and the Development of New Sciences

Key positions:

- Islamic civilization was built on knowledge. The early Muslims established intellectual disciplines that served the core of their civilization: the Holy Book.
- Muslims developed new intellectual disciplines in addition to transmitting knowledge from communities that preceded them, which aided them in understanding reality, comprehending the world as it is, and grasping metaphysical truth.
- The development of sciences and disciplines (tawlid al-'ulum) was characteristic of the adherents of Islam up until the fourth century A.H. In fact, it extended well into the sixth century when 'Adud al-Din al-Iji created a new intellectual discipline that he called 'ilm al-Wad'', which he derived from the disciplines of linguistics, grammar, syntax, theology (usul), and logic.
- Development of new sciences requires the ability for creative imagination, which may not be possessed by many of those who are occupied with the transmittal and maintenance of knowledge. Creative imagination is needed for ijtihad, and our ancestors counted it as one of its essential requirements. Its absence indicates that the process of ijtihad, which originates in the innate ability of the jurist, has died out.
- Before we delve further into the mechanisms of developing sciences and disciplines, we need to understand some things about the position of religion towards knowledge. Not only do we say that Islam is a religion of knowledge, we also perceive its position towards intellectual investigation wherein it considers there to be no prohibition or restrictions on intellectual investigations whatsoever; anyone who wants may investigate anything they want and attempt to understand the world as they like, and uncover what they want about God's creation in His universe.

- The distinction between the freedom of investigation to arrive at correct knowledge and restricting applications of this knowledge in order to arrive at positive development has confused many people despite its clarity and reaffirmation.

The Moral Ceiling of Intellectual Investigation

Source: Islamtorrents.net

Islamic civilization was built on knowledge. The early Muslims established intellectual disciplines that served the core of their civilization: the Holy Book. They adhered to this core, served it, followed it, and made it a standard for acceptance, rejection, and evaluation. Muslims developed new intellectual disciplines in addition to transmitting knowledge from communities that preceded them, which aided them in understanding reality, comprehending the world as it is, and grasping metaphysical truth. They compiled this knowledge and passed it on to their contemporaries and those who came after them.

We witnessed the age of translation during the reign of al-Ma'mun, and in authors like al-Biruni in his book "*Tahqiq ma lil-Hind min Maqulatih Mamduhah fi al-Aql 'aw Mardhula*" ("A Critical Study of What India Says, Whether Accepted by Reason or Refuted"), and al-Khawarizmi in "*Miftah al-'Ulum*" ("The Key of Knowledge"), which outlines the epistemological approach in Islamic history and observes diversity on the one hand and engagement on the other. These are the two characteristics that are agreed on by all who have studied the Islamic tradition and its intellectual product.

The development of sciences and disciplines (tawlid al-'ulum) was characteristic of the adherents of Islam up until the fourth century A.H. In fact, it extended well into the sixth century when 'Adud al-Din al-Iji created a new intellectual discipline that he called 'ilm al-Wad'', which he derived from the disciplines of linguistics, grammar, syntax, theology (*usul*), and logic. The most important thing that he addressed with this was the question of terminology. This remains one of the most crucial epistemological questions to this day since terminology is a regulator of knowledge and provides for the maintenance of scientific language and mutual understanding within the scientific community. It is comprised of two important aspects: passing on knowledge to those who come after us, and the constant, continuous, and disciplined development of knowledge. This generation of knowledge died out and scholars became preoccupied with repeating inherited knowledge and protecting it from being lost in reaction to what happened in the seventh century with the Tatar invasion and the fall of Baghdad in 656 A.H.

Muhammad Rashid Rida, in his article entitled "Karamat al-Awliya'" ("The Miracles of the Saints"), in Al-Manar magazine (issue 26 of the second year, Saturday, 3 Jumada al-Aakhir, 1317 Hijri, 9 September, 1899 AD) called for the creation of a new intellectual discipline that would study the Divine norms (al-sunan al-ilahiyah) mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, but this was not accomplished until nearly one hundred years after he made this call. We must realize that the development of sciences and disciplines is a manifestation of intellectual life and that it has not died out. It is also a manifestation of engaging with the age in which we live. It is, thirdly, the bridge that connects Islamic Law (shariah) with the world around us.

Many sincere people ask how one can develop new sciences and disciplines. It requires the ability for creative imagination, which may not be possessed by many of those who are occupied with the transmittal and maintenance of knowledge. Creative imagination is needed for ijтиhad, and our ancestors counted it as one of its essential requirements. Its absence indicates that the process of ijтиhad, which originates in the innate ability of the jurist, has died out. In affirmation of this we see Imam al-Suyuti remarking, "'Ibn Burhan said, 'Consensus cannot be reached if one mujtahid disagrees, which is an opposing position from the rest of the jurists. The main argument of the adversary is that if a vast number [1] of mujtahids agree on a certain issue, the isolated opinion of one mujtahid only indicates the weakness of his opinion. We replied to this saying that this is not true since the opinion agreed upon by everyone may only be an apparent meaning that immediately presents itself in the mind, and the individual's opinion may be more accurate and obscure. Furthermore, this individual may have stood apart from the rest in possessing superior powers of intellection and greater intellectual clarity. That is why, in every age, there is someone who is superior in knowledge who establishes issues from other issues and generates that which is unique.'" [2]

Al-Suyuti then quotes Al-Ghazali as saying, "*Conceptualizing issues is in itself not a light matter. In fact, an intelligent person may be able to issue fatwas on any issue if he is provided with its conceptualization, but if required to conceptualize it himself, to conceive of all of the issues that branch off from it and all related scenarios and happenings, he would be incapable of doing so and these conceptualizations would not even occur to him for these are the affairs of the mujtahids.'*" [3]

Let us give an example of the development of sciences and discipline in answer to those who want a model that they can follow, and in order to ease the minds of those who doubt this process and think it may conceal an attack on the immutable foundations of religion or detract from the identity of Islam. We will try to shed some light on the seeds of generating knowledge as well as its mechanisms in the Islamic tradition in the hopes that we may begin to understand the methodology that the agents of that tradition followed in service of their civilization.

Since the subject has arisen, methodology, in my opinion, is a comprehensive vision from which emanate executable steps. This comprehensive vision is the paradigm that we have discussed previously, whereas the processes represent the method of intellectual investigation that we see with the scholars of juristic methodology. Al-Razi and his school of thought define juristic methodology as: knowledge of juristic evidences in general, how to derive specific rulings from them, and the condition of the one carrying out the derivation. In other words he spoke about the sources of juristic research, how to go about conducting it and the ways of attaining it, and the characteristics of a researcher. These are precisely the three essential components of the scientific method as later defined by Roger Bacon: the sources, the approaches, and the researcher. Before we delve further into the mechanisms of developing sciences and disciplines, we need to understand some things about the position of religion towards knowledge. Not only do we say that Islam is a religion of knowledge, we also perceive its position towards intellectual investigation wherein it considers there to be no prohibition or restrictions on intellectual investigations whatsoever; anyone who wants to may investigate anything they want and attempt to understand the world as they like, and uncover what they want about God's creation in His universe.

This is a guarantee for creativity and it is based on the fact that the very beginning of God's revelation was Read in the name of your Lord who created. He created man from a clot. Read and your Lord is Most Honorable, Who taught with the pen [96: 1-4]. It has been mentioned that the first reading is a reading of existence, and the second is a reading of revelation, and they both emanate from God, the first from the domain of creation, and the second from the domain of the command: Surely His is the creation and the command; blessed is Allah, the Lord of the worlds [7: 54].

Based on this there is no end to perceiving existence since it represents truth by virtue of its originating with God, and there is no end to perceiving revelation. The Prophet, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him, said, "*There is no end to its wonders and it does not become worn out through much repetition.*" (narrated by A.-Tirmidhi and Al-Darimi). There is also no contradiction between the two since they both emanate from God. This basis is confirmed in His saying Are those who know and those who do not know alike? [39: 9].

However, the use of information must fall within the moral bounds for application, which are taken from the goals of human beings in the world: to worship, to engage in positive development, and to purify the self. These prevent the use of what we have arrived at for things that disagrees with Divine commandments and prohibitions, or in ways that would invalidate the comprehensive goals of religion. Accordingly, we become constructive, rather than destructive people. These bounds of application are of the utmost importance since they are the only guarantee for this positive development. The distinction between the freedom of investigation to arrive at correct knowledge and restricting applications of this knowledge in order to arrive at positive development has confused many people despite its clarity and reaffirmation.

It is a fact that disciplines of knowledge posses a comprehensive conceptualization that is represented in the form of a complete instructional process for the conveyance of information, and education for the inculcation of values, and vocational training to acquire skills. All of this cannot be separated, and if it is, we will lose the "manual of operations," so to speak. The loss of the manual of operations leads to confusion and disorder. It seems that we have indeed lost this manual of operations in many spheres of our life today, not just our intellectual lives, but also in our political, social, and religious lives.

It is also a fact that there is a difference between religious knowledge and religiosity. The first is carried out by a group of intellectuals and has its sources and methods. The educational process, as we indicated earlier, has essential integral aspects that must be complemented by its five basic elements: a student, a teacher, a method, a text, and an intellectual environment. The second, religiosity, is required of all those who fall under legal obligation for the purpose of ordering their relationship with themselves, the universe, and God.

Another fact is that there is a difference between jurisprudence (fiqh) and intellectual contemplation (fikr). The subject of jurisprudence is the actions of those who are legally obligated. Jurisprudence is concerned with describing the actions of the legally obligated as something to be engaged in or abstained from and classifies them as permissible (halal) or forbidden (haram) implementing five juristic rulings: the obligatory (al-wajib), the recommended (al-mandub), the prohibited (al-haram), the disliked (al-makruh), and the permissible (al-mubah).

As for intellectual contemplation, it deals with the relative, complex, and ever-changing lived reality. People use this to order informational matters as premises in order to arrive at an unknown as a conclusion. The intellectual process is the bridge between Islamic law and the world. For this reason it requires spheres of knowledge that are continuously being generated and renewed since the nature of the reality that we are trying to apprehend is highly complex and variable.

If all of the aforementioned is agreed upon, then the Islamic tradition has laid down what are called “the ten bases.” These are the elements that must be taken into consideration when disciplines of knowledge are generated, namely: the definition of the discipline, its subject, its originator, its relation to other disciplines, the disciplines upon which it draws, its rulings and the issues with which it deals, its merit, the ruling of studying it, its name, and the fruits and benefits to be gained through it. These ten elements represent an entrance to any discipline that an intellectual seeking to establish a discipline of knowledge can ascertain as a beginning towards the independence of the discipline or its creation. So how is this done? A call for the establishment of a discipline that would bring back the great mujtahids and bring about the intellectual debate that stimulates minds. At the end of the previous article we mentioned the “ten bases” which are particular to every intellectual discipline. The Islamic tradition has laid down what are referred to as the ten bases so that students may enquire about them and by so doing be drawn towards that discipline, or to know that which needs to be known. Additionally, these are the same elements that must be taken into consideration when generating new disciplines. Some have put these bases into verse for young students to memorize in order to create in them this kind of aspiration that has diminished and become restricted to repetition and recitation without

establishing new disciplines and continuing the intellectual process. Whoever desires an art should first present a defined discipline, followed by a subject its originator, its relation, and its sources of derivation its merit, and its findings its name, its benefits, and its ruling Those are ten means to the end Some have confined themselves to a few But those who know them all triumph

These ten bases are: defining the discipline, its subject, its originator, its relation to other disciplines, the disciplines from which it is derived, its rulings and the issues with which it deals, its merit, the ruling of studying it, its name, and its fruits and benefits. These ten bases represent a gateway to any discipline that prompts the student to aspire to study and acquire it. They are also the same bases that an intellectual desiring to establish a new discipline can define as a first step to gaining independence for it or creating it.

Those who would like an example according to which we can generate a discipline to serve Islam and Muslims may begin with one that can be called Islamic Discourse (al-khitab al-Islami). There is no greater need than the need for this discipline to be studied by those who give sermons, teachers, lay-preachers, muftis, and religious leaders whom people take as role models. They would realize how to deal with people, and they would understand their problems and the appropriate manner in which to approach them.

We often hear criticisms of many preachers and of the confusion that has engulfed satellite television channels and the media in dealing with religion. Had a discipline like this existed with the characteristics that we will explain, it would have served as a reference and a measure by which the correct and the incorrect could be judged; it would have been a regulator preventing deviation, shortcomings, and faults. It would also have served as the impetus for the continuous exemplary execution of one's duties, the rewards of which would be reaped at all times, God willing. Intellectual disciplines have different subjects. The subject of a discipline is the subject whose foundational elements are being investigated; the matter (al-masa'il) of the discipline is made up of the subject and an appropriate description of it. The matter of the discipline is the complete sentence as it has been defined in Arabic in the field of grammar and elsewhere. A complete sentence is made up of a subject and a predicate, or a verb and a subject. Both of these kinds of sentences [1] are the same in indicating

a complete sentence from which the listener understands that which was intended by the speaker. It is for this reason that the rhetoricians and logicians consider them to be one. The rhetoricians call the two essential elements of a sentence the musnad and the musnad ilayh, while logicians call them the mawdu' (antecedent) and the mahmul (complement).

The subject of medicine is the human body from the perspective of health and illness. Accordingly, the human body is the subject, and the states of health and illness that it experiences along with their means of treatment and their causes represent the predicate, which comprises the complete sentence of the discipline of medicine. The human body, then, is the musnad ilayh, the subject of a nominal sentence or a verb, so it is the mawdu', and that by which information about it is provided is al-musnad, a predicate or the subject of a verb, so it is the mahmul, meaning that it is the mahmul of that mawdu'. So statements like "The human body becomes ill due to microbes and gets well through medicine," make up the discipline. Similarly, the subject of the discipline of jurisprudence (fiqh) is the actions of a legally obligated person such prayer, zakat, or even theft and murder. The ruling represents the predicate. We say, "*Prayer is obligatory*," "*Stealing is forbidden*," and "*Idle folly is disliked*," and these sentences are the subject matter of the discipline of jurisprudence.

What, then, is the subject of Islamic Discourse? We can call it conveying the message (tabligh al-da'wah). Here we need to define the concept of conveyance as being comprised of three parts: the speaker, the listener, and the message: discourse, or speech. We should begin by elucidating the characteristics of the speaker, the conditions that they should satisfy, the knowledge with which they should be equipped, the realities that they should comprehend, the tools that they should possess, and the approaches, methods, sources, and operations that they should employ. Next, we can elucidate the listener and their types, their levels, the means of communication that are appropriate for them, the criteria for measuring the achievement of goals with them, and the media through which they can be contacted and which are appropriate for different kinds of listeners. We then move on to the address and study its form, its content, its types, its styles, its language, its register, its reference, its valuation, its diversity, its development, and its composition. We then move on to the study of the concept of da'wah (the message) and its particularities that give the

address a different flavor, a quality that may not be present in other forms of address; how to link words with deeds and a good example; the difficulties that surround this, and the ways in which to solve, deal with, or prevent them.

All this requires other disciplines from which we can derive our new discipline, such as communications, information media, rhetoric, the disciplines of the shari'ah, linguistics, semantics, content analysis, and field research, with the aid of some of the tools used in the Humanities and Social Sciences, such as observation, analysis, tables, graphs, and illustrations. Available sources of information must also be utilized, such as the Internet, satellite television channels, and effective techniques in crowd Psychology, and the Psychology of Communication. If we define a discipline, know its subject matter, determine the disciplines from which it is derived, conceptualize an index of the topics that it addresses, and assign it a name, this enables us to deal with its results, fruits, implications, and how to use it. It must also be established in an open form that allows for additions to be made, its development and renewal, and the generation of other disciplines from it. This way the discipline is independent and we can stand on solid ground calling to God the Almighty who said: Say, 'This is my way; I call unto God standing on sure knowledge, I and those who follow me. Holy is God, and I am not one of those who associate divinities with God [10:108].

In fulfillment of this verse, and in order to call to God with profound insight, we must do so in accordance with a discipline which is taught to all those who speak of Islam in the public sphere so it may be a reliance for them. This is the purpose of my calling for the generating of disciplines: so that Islamic civilization can return to its previous state of contributing, and so we do not have to hear some say that Islamic civilization is no more. We will find a place for the discipline of Islamic Discourse between the social sciences on the one hand and the Islamic sciences on the other. Then we will understand the benefits of this discipline and that its study is a fard kifaya (communal obligation) that could develop into a fard ayn (individual obligation) for all those who speak of and transmit religion.

The originator of the discipline will be the first person to write in it, and if a group writes in it at the same time, there will be a dispute as to who among them was the first. We will return to the sweetness of

intellectual discussions and beneficial disagreements that used to stimulate minds, nurture egos to accept other opinions, and train students and scholars to research, organize evidence, and explain their evidentiary significance. It would also bring the Muslim intellect out of the state of imitation and stagnation engulfing it and the intellectual crisis through which it is going and plunge it and into another kind of depth of understanding, an awareness of its surroundings, and the capacity to bring about conditions for the return of the great mujtahids capable of presenting what they understand logically and with evidence that everyone accepts; even if they do not take it as a path for themselves, they will respect the methodology and confirm its veracity regardless of the results or people's differing approaches.

Disciplines are not generated completed. Even the discipline of prosody (*al-'urud*) by which Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi systematized Arabic poetry was not complete when it was generated. Although it was almost complete, we saw that al-Akhfash added another meter, *Bahr al-Mutadarak*, and scholars of this science added other poetic meters as well; it is true that the Arabs did not use them, and none of their poetry has been related to us in these meters, but it was added to the discipline and expanded the meaning of poetry as is described by al-Damanhuri in his book, *Al-Kafi fi al-'Urud wa al-Qawafi*. Even Ahmad Shawqi, the Prince of Poets, devised new poetic meters that had not existed before.

The generation of disciplines of knowledge is an appropriate approach to practically overcoming this deadly crisis through which our community is passing. One of the approaches of the righteous has been to turn to knowledge in all of its forms when the Tatars attacked Muslim lands and some cities were under the rule of the Crusaders. Let us study the example of Imam al-Nawawi who worked twenty hours a day to preserve knowledge and pass it on to those who followed him, to the extent that he did not sleep on his side for two years, he never married because of his preoccupation with knowledge, and he died at the young age of less than 45 according to the Hijri calendar. Let us also recall the examples of al-Nuwayri in *Nihayat al-Arb*, al-Qalqashandi in *Subh al-A'asha*, Ibn Manthur in *Lisan al-'Arab*, and others who wrote encyclopedias, and how they faced tyranny, aggression, and the changes of time. Are Muslims truly in need of an intellectual discipline that we can call Islamic Discourse (*al-Khitab al-Islami*)? My answer is yes, they are in need of it due to the requirements

of their existence and the preservation of their identity in this world that has become one village. Through means of transportation, communication, and modern technology, this global village has lead to a perceived proximity and mutual influence. This has occurred to the extent that the barriers between internal and external affairs have nearly vanished. We have seen that the arguments for the occupation of Iraq and the threat to occupy other lands are the actions of what goes on internally. It is no longer praiseworthy or beneficial, however, to hold onto the belief that it is simply an internal affair.

Since we reject this principle, which is used by those with power to impose their colonial hegemony and gain economic benefits, we must work on that which will transform our current state for the sake of God, so that God may look upon us with a Merciful gaze, transform our state, and grant us success in that which He loves and which pleases Him. Lo! God does not change the condition of a people until they (first) change that which is in their hearts; and if God wills misfortune for a people there is none that can repel it, nor have they a defender beside Him [13:11].

I attended a conference in Kuwait held by the Faculty of Shari'ah and Islamic Studies entitled "The Islamic Discourse in the Sea of Events and Developments." The conference was on May 17th and 18th of 2004 and I presented a study on the principles of this topic and called for the establishment of a new discipline called The Islamic Discourse. The scholars at the conference approved of this suggestion and added their recommendations. This illustrates the importance of this appeal and the necessity of adopting it without delay and adding it to the curriculum in the faculties of Shari'ah at Islamic universities, especially al-Azhar University. There is also a need for scholars to collaborate in its composition, its enrichment, and deriving it from several other disciplines so that it may be elucidated and gain a base of support.

In establishing a field for this new discipline one may be aided by the other studies that were presented at this conference. The conference attendees included Prof. Ahmed Omar Hashem, former president of Al-Azhar University and member of the Assembly of Islamic Research; Prof. Nabil Ghunaym, professor at the Faculty of Dar-al-Ulum, Cairo University; and Prof. Ibrahim Abdulrahim, professor at the Faculty of Dar-al-Ulum, Cairo University; from Sudan Prof.

Issam Al-Bashir, Minister of Endowments at the time; and many scholars from Switzerland, France, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, as well as scholars from different nationalities from the Faculty of Shari'ah in Kuwait. In particular I mention Prof. Ahmed Gaballah, Dean of the European College for Islamic Studies in Paris, whose paper was titled "The Openness of the Islamic Discourse and the Requirements of the Contemporary Period" in which he emphasized the importance of the Islamic discourse in the field of Human Relations.

This paper reminded me of our late teacher Prof. Mahir 'Ilaysh who, while teaching the subject of Human Relations, told us of how he went to the United States to get a PhD in this field, at a time when less than thirty years had passed since that subject's inception. He went to his university's library thinking that he would find one or two books, maybe ten, which he could finish reading, get his PhD, and return to Egypt in six months. He asked the librarian for the books on Human Relations and told him to bring him all of them, no matter how many there were. The librarian took him to one of the floors of the library, which was the shape of a large circle around which a car could drive, and said, "*All of the books you see in front of you from the floor to the ceiling, the length of this whole floor, are the all on Human Relations.*" Dr. Mahir 'Ilaysh did not tell us this story in order to entertain us, nor did he tell it so that our jaws would drop in astonishment and amazement at knowledge that has no end; he told it to inculcate in us a skill that would be the basis for a desire for knowledge; a love of reading, of researching, of writing, and of knowledge. May God have mercy on the professor, he was a believer in God and His prophet, and he loved Egypt passionately.

Prof. Ahmed Gaballah then discussed the multiplicity of modes of discourse and the particular characteristics of the Islamic discourse. He mentioned that it is a discourse that achieves clear conveyance. It has the characteristics of wisdom and kindness. It considers the nature of the one who hears it, adheres to the principles of freedom and balance, avoids stirring up animosity and negative reactions, and it maintains humility and is not distressed by being opposed or questioned. It is an open discourse because it believes in the reality of differences between people, in the right of others to hold their own beliefs to be correct and to undertake the duty of bearing witness to them in front of people.

It knows that it is in the age of open media and globalization and that this openness requires discourse to spring from the conviction of the speaker and the readiness to comprehend and understand the argument of those who hold differing opinions. One must also benefit from connecting with the other through self-examination, correcting mistakes, and making known points of agreement with those who differ.

From this he arrived at the necessity of specialization, depth, and distancing oneself from generalizations and superficiality. He arrived at combining a basis in tradition with renewal. He arrived at caring for the human aspect in the Islamic discourse. He arrived at courageously undertaking controversial issues, preferring logic based on rational persuasion over rhetoric, combining idealism with realism, emphasizing the educational, spiritual, and civilizational aspects of the Islamic discourse, renewing both the form and content of religious preaching, and benefiting from the techniques and means of the contemporary discourse. The most important point of all is to submit the Islamic discourse to constant reevaluation. In regard to this last point he affirmed that describing this discourse as being Islamic does not place it above continuous criticism which leads to improving its articulation, re-working its order, and working to correct its trajectory if something occurs to discredit or limit it.

This is a point of utmost importance that has been overlooked by many of those who have set themselves up as proponents of Islamic discourse. It has even been overlooked by those who have criticized them in that even the critics themselves have felt that they were opposing Islam itself by objecting to its formulation and rhetoric. This is relevant since, as Prof. Ahmed Gaballah put it in his paper, "*An idea being true does not necessitate that its articulation be correct or its presentation be good. In fact, an idea may be extremely strong, but its expression and articulation may be so poor that the idea loses its strength.*" Then I went to London with a group of scholars and intellectuals from June 6th to 14th 2004 to discuss the image of Islam and Muslims with intellectuals, politicians, and social scientists who were interested in this issue. I grew even more convinced of the necessity of establishing a discipline which can help solve these particular and complex issues that bewilder the West and has made it, due to its inherited culture which clashed with Muslim countries, confused and lost as to how to interact with even their own Muslim citizens.

I found the problem of third generation Muslims whose grandparents emigrated from the Indian Sub-Continent, and elsewhere, and participated in the industrial revolution and whose children took part in the wars undertaken by the British. Since their birth these Muslims have known no other homeland other than this country. In spite of all that they have learned and been raised with, however, they go and commit suicide operations. The English mind cannot fathom this puzzle. Some people tell them that Islam is the cause of this because it is a religion of conflict; Bernard Lewis says that the terrorists are implementing Islam, but he does not mention the truth; that they have departed drastically from Islam. Non-Muslims are confused because they have known Muslims to be peaceful citizens, then all of a sudden this kind of person emerges and Lewis and others like him are ready with these false explanations. There are even those who call themselves Muslims who are confused and publish things here and there that show there is a kind of contradiction in their thought.

A discipline of Islamic Discourse will confirm many conceptions that can accurately explain this situation, show it to be a state of deficiency and clarify this deficiency without confusion. A discipline of Islamic Discourse will affirm the concept of community (*ummah*), but it will also confirm the concept of an authoritative reference, the concept of specialization, and the difference between religion and religious practice. This discipline will affirm the concept of necessary preconditions without which one cannot undertake a specific action. Prayer, for example, is not valid without ablutions, even if one were to pray one hundred times, nor is it valid unless it is directed towards the Kaaba, even if one were to pray one thousand times, nor is it valid if performed before the time established for it by the *Shari'ah*. Jihad is only valid if undertaken under recognized leadership, and when this leadership is lost there is no jihad and it becomes murder rather than struggle, even if those carrying it out claim that it is for the sake of God.

The loss of an authoritative reference and an understanding of necessary preconditions is the outward cause of this situation along with the presence of the concept of community in the minds of these young people. This concept of community is a correct concept, but it was not taught to them as being restricted by the necessary conditions of working within it, so the scales fell out of balance in their hands and they caused ruin rather than creating good.

Khabbab ibn al-Art (may God be pleased with him) came to the Prophet (may the peace and blessings of God be upon him) and complained to him asking him for victory. Khabbab said, "We complained to the Prophet (may the peace and blessings of God be upon him) when he was resting on his cloak in the shade of the Kaaba saying, 'Will you not seek victory for us? Will you not pray for us?'" In Ahmad's narration it says, "The Messenger of God's face turned red, his color changed." "He replied, 'Before your time a man would be placed in a hole that was dug for him and a saw would be brought and placed on his head which would be separated into two and he would be combed with the steel combs through the flesh and bone, but this would not turn him away from his religion. By God, this matter will not end until a rider can travel from Sana'a to Hadramout without fearing anything but God and the wolves who attack his sheep, but you seek to rush things.'" Narrated by al-Bukhari.

It has been established in the Sunna of the Prophet that 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Auf and some of his companions came to the Prophet in Mecca (may the peace and blessings of God be upon him) and said, "O Messenger of God, we had glory and honor when we were polytheists, but when we believed we became meek and humiliated." He replied, "I have been commanded to have compassion and forgiveness, so do not fight." Narrated by al-Nisa'i. As if addressing ignorant and hot tempered people whom passion has blinded from obedience to God, He says in the Quran, And if it had not been for believing men and believing women, whom you knew not - lest ye should tread them under foot and thus incur guilt for them unknowingly; that God might bring into His mercy whom He will [48:25].

Those who are confused by a contradiction that they perceive between the Quranic texts that affirm jihad and others that affirm forbearance, forgiveness, pardon, and accepting the other, are not aware of the conditions for each of them. Looking at each from the appropriate angle makes it a difference of kind, not of opposition. We again affirm the necessity of establishing this discipline in the hopes that over the next twenty years we will see books written in it that fill an entire floor of a large library, or can be downloaded on a CD-Rom like the encyclopedias and reference materials of other disciplines...Amen.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=93

http://islamtorrents.net/?page_id=10

Dar al Iftaa Journal, 7th edition, January 2011

Source: *Dar al Iftaa Journal*

Editorial

Praise be to Allah and peace and blessings be upon our master, the Messenger of Allah and upon his Companions and those who follow him. To proceed, Scholarly research is one of the most prominent features of progress, cultural refinement and the rise of nations. Without development in knowledge as an essential tool for revealing truth and unravelling mysteries , countries and societies cannot develop. Allah the Almighty says, Say: "*Travel through the earth and see how Allah did originate creation; so will Allah produce a later creation: for Allah has power over all things.*" [Al-'Ankabut, 20]

It is worthwhile to note that the imperative mood of the verbs 'travel' and 'see' in this verse expresses obligation; the noun 'earth' denotes generality and a lack of restrictions in the search for knowledge, and the adverb 'how' suggests the need for a deep observation and scrutiny that goes beyond mere appearances. Consider the following verses:

Do they not look at the sky above them?—How We have made it and adorned it wit, and there are no flaws in it? [Qaf, 6]

Do they see nothing in the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth and all that Allah hath created? [Al-A'raf, 185]

It will become apparent to anyone who reflects on these verses that research—and scholarly research in particular—are among the Divine commands and obligations. Allah the Almighty has mandated that man travel the earth to observe, contemplate and learn—all for the purpose of benefitting the world and humanity with knowledge and the knowledgeable. It is clear that Allah has favored scholars and scientists over others and said, Say: "*Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know?*" [Al-Zumar, 9]

UNESCO defines scholarly research as the, 'study, experimentation, formulation of concepts and the selection of theories which generate scholarly knowledge'. It is from this point of departure that needs are determined, solutions defined and necessary means for achieving them are devised.

Muslim scholars have devised a methodology of research, contemplation and deduction for all fields of knowledge, both the theoretical and empirical. One of the landmark characteristics of the way they advanced scholarly research, is their commitment to a fixed scholarly methodology that builds upon acknowledged general precepts, which are themselves focused on the establishment, advancement and preservation of a genuine search for true knowledge.

Muslim scholars have explored all the implemented methodologies of scholarly research in great depth. They reconciled traditional logic with [Islamic theory], before Arabizing and employing it. They extended the use of analogy and employed it in their study of Islamic legal sciences such as in the principles of jurisprudence and others. Moreover, they devised a mathematical method and used symbols, laid down the principles of algebra, defined geometry, and devised and developed new geometric theories. They arrived at an important methodological development—that of observation and induction. Furthermore, in their researches on social sciences, they employed the most suitable methodologies to their studies.

The scientific intellect of Muslim scholars did not discriminate between the various scholarly methodologies in their research; rather, they made use of each of them in their appropriate places. This is because reason, according to them, is distinguished by a keen desire to determine the sources of knowledge and to offer a nuanced categorization of the different fields of knowledge on this basis. Thus, the empirical disciplines such as chemistry and physics are different from rational disciplines such as mathematics, which, in turn, are different from the transmitted disciplines such as language and Islamic law. These disciplines may sometimes overlap as in the social and human sciences; however, each discipline employs research methods and principles of evidence that are specific to it.

Unlike Descartes, Muslim scholars did not maintain that the method of mathematics is the only valid methodology for all disciplines. Rather, they believed in all paths and means leading to correct conclusions as long as they are compatible with human reason. Western scholars drew extensively upon methodologies employed by Arab scientists, using them extensively and developing them further. Examples include scholars such as Bertrand Russell and Francis Bacon, who set out the fundamentals of modern scholarship.

Consequently, today, research employs the methodologies that agree with the nature of the discipline involved; the methodologies of mathematics, logic, and induction; sociology; and history are the ones that are prevalent at present. In fact, they are the same methodologies used by Muslim scholars during their historical periods of scientific glory. Analyzing the scientific intellect of our predecessors and their cultural legacy, becoming acquainted with its characteristics and scholarly methodologies in order to follow their path of scholarly research is the correct starting point for our participation in the building of our human culture. The world is in need of Muslims and their heritage, their way of thinking, their experience in embracing other cultures, the cross fertilization of ideas and the derivation of new formulations in dealing with all the spheres of life.

If empirical sciences play an important role in our contemporary culture, then conducting research in the Islamic legal sciences is no less important. Though the latter employs its own unique research methods and organization of evidences, a researcher in this field employs his scholarly intellect in a manner that suits his discipline to determine its research methods, and organize its evidences, so as to present a consistent worldview. He refrains from neglecting its particulars, while expounding on the origins and details of central issues, setting out terminology for its concepts, and relying in all this on the reality of things independent of impressions, desires or delusions. For the researcher knows that the true nature of things is constant and ascertained by research and verification.

Due to the firmly established belief that scholarly research is the standard and measure by which difficult matters are investigated and balanced and conclusions reached, the Journal of the Dar al-Ifta was interested in publishing scholarly researches in the field of Islamic legal sciences, especially those conducted by young Egyptian and foreign scholars and researchers who have conformed to meticulous research criteria. The Journal of Dar al-Ifta has resolved to publishing studies based on the criteria it has laid down over the two years it has been in circulation (during which time it has issued six editions). During this time, the magazine was, and will remain by the will of Allah, a beacon in the field of scholarly research in the various Islamic legal sciences. It has undertaken to publish opinions and ideas, expressed through the medium of specialized scholarly researches, which take up in detail topics of relevance to the modern world in a manner that

combines originality and currency. A person who reflects on the researches published in the Journal since its inception will notice, in spite of its few editions, their diversity and the balance the Journal seeks to strike between the branches of the various Islamic legal sciences under its purview. The topics of the specialized researches are diverse and range from principles of jurisprudence, juristic theories and the different areas of law. The Journal has published penetrating scholarly researches on ritual worship, transactions, family affairs as well as topics related to the intersection between governance and Islamic law. The willingness to engage in new topics in the field of law, and the originality of the distinctive conclusions reached in the various studies is noticeable.

There is no doubt that a person who reads the studies published in any of the editions will further notice that they influence the direction of fatawa issued by Dar al-Ifta al-Misriyyah, and are of great assistance to the members of the Fatwa Council in understanding the reality of the times and the legal ruling pertaining to them, for legal verdicts are to reflect the realities of their context, changing as a function of time, place, and circumstance. This relationship becomes glaringly evident if we compare the researches published in the Journal to the fatawa pertaining to the same issues, such as hymen restoration and invalid transactions in non-Muslim lands.

In this issue, the Journal continues in its mission by presenting a distinguished selection of scholarly studies in the fields of Islamic jurisprudence and its principles. In choosing these studies, it was thought appropriate to keep in mind that they constitute a contribution suitable to the aspirations of the Islamic community to achieve their reformation and renaissance. This will only come to pass with an initiative to obey the injunctions mentioned in the foundational texts. This is expounded upon by Dr. 'Abdul-Salam 'Abdul-Fatah 'Abdul-'Azim in his commendable research on whether the command to do something requires immediate obedience. In an attempt to promote the means towards social reformation by taking into consideration the weaker social stratum, Dr. Mohammed Harbi 'Abdul-Fatah deals with the issue of street children and the state's role in their guardianship. The Journal is not oblivious to one of the most important means of reformation, mainly education. Towards this end, the researcher Waheed Ahmed 'Abdul-Jawad puts forth in his research a recommendation to activate the role of endowments in funding educational

activities and scholarly research, and seek to develop them in a manner that suits our present time. And in the social sphere, Dr. Mohammed Ali 'Ukaz presents a study on the origins and the juristic status of cooperation and reciprocity which has become an important factor of our current lives.

In conclusion, I ask Allah the Almighty that this Journal and the research it publishes become the means to guidance to good both in this world and in the Hereafter. Praise be Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

**Dr. Ali Goma Mohammed
Grand Mufti of Egypt**

Reference: Dar al Iftaa Journal, 7th edition, January 2011.

The Role of Classical Knowledge and Education in Modern Arab Higher Education", October 2, 2011

Source: *Ali-gomaa.com*

Speech delivered in the International Conference of "Knowledge and Education in Classical Islam: Historical Foundations & Contemporary Impact" in Gottingen University, Germany. Allow me to express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation for Professor Dr Sebastien Gunther of Gottingen University and Dr. Ali Shaban of the esteemed Al Azhar University who afforded me the opportunity to come to this profound gathering of luminaries of Islamic scholarship.

It will come as no surprise to those gathered at this conference that knowledge and learning have always occupied pride of place in Islamic society. In the very first revelation, God commands the Prophet to "Recite!" in the name of a God who taught by a pen. And He explicitly extols the virtue of knowledge elsewhere, for example, by asking rhetorically how it can be possible that those who know can be considered to be at the same level as those who know not. This emphasis on knowledge is equally prominent in the second source of Islamic authority, the Prophet's example. Consider, for example the famous hadith in which the Prophet encourages believers to "seek knowledge even unto China." Thus, the importance of learning is found within the most foundational sources of Islam, a crucial part of the Muslim identity from the very outset.

And Islamic history testifies to the enduring value placed on learning. In the early period, the emphasis was on coming to know how to act in accordance with the revelation of Allah and the message of His Prophet. Therefore, detailed methodologies were designed to instruct in the proper recitation and understanding of the Qur'an, the authentication of hadith, and the deduction of rules governing the life of a believing Muslim. In the Islamic paradigm, there has always been a strong link between knowledge and morality in Islam. Knowledge is necessary to be a good Muslim, and piety, devotion and right conduct are prerequisites for arriving at true knowledge. Historically, in Islam, the bearers of knowledge carried with them not only an authority on the basis of their being learned members of the community, but also a moral authority by virtue of their concern for the welfare of the people. They were concerned with their welfare in both this world and in the afterlife. Indeed, this basic premise is what guides our work at the

Dar al-Ifta in Egypt – the highest authority for Islamic legal interpretation in the world--overriding concern to provide consultation and advice to the Egyptian people so that they may fulfill their deeply-felt obligations to live by the worldview of Islam.

In our view, it bears emphasizing that the constant enthusiasm on the part of Muslims to understand the Islamic message can only really be explained by this underlying motivation to act in a way that best coincides with the Will of God. This is an underappreciated part of Islamic knowledge – that its ultimate goal was to produce virtuous people. And that ethics and learning are two sides of the same coin in the Islamic understanding.

Of course, this basic concern found itself in a variety of disciplines and investigations. So, in their quest for the truth, Muslims read, translated, and learned from the ancient Greek heritage. And in their love for knowledge, they not only wrote in all genres, but also made it a priority to teach the community at large. As Gd instructs, there must always be a segment of the community studying the religion, and admonishing and educating the rest. This is why institutions of Islamic learning spread everywhere in the Muslim world. The small study circles that can be found in virtually every mosque, to the great universities of Islam like the esteemed Al Azhar in Egypt, and centres of learning in Central Asia, India, the Maghreb and Iraq-- indeed all over the Muslim world. These are no accident. This is a result of the way learning and knowledge were a reflection of the deepest parts of Islamic identity.

Today, we find ourselves at a crossroads in the Muslim world. We feel a deep and yearning desire to go back to our roots and re-establish the traditions of learning that distinguished the Muslim community or the Ummah for centuries as a people of the pen. This is a challenge for us, and it is one in which we need to remember our past, but also think towards the future. The deep and profound insights we learn from the historical example of Islamic civilization cannot be discarded altogether, even as we remain committed to forging ahead in the modern world. This will be a key if the Arab and Muslim world are to develop and advance. The recent events of the Arab Spring have only underlined the importance of this point throughout the Arab and Muslim world. The revolutions we witnessed in Cairo , and Tunis , and elsewhere present us with a wonderful opportunity to re-visit the

systems of education that we have in place. It is a great misfortune of the Arab world that we have for many years lagged far behind in giving our children and our nation the basic tools by which to not only make their lives and the their societies better, but also to establish a stronger connection with their Islamic heritage – a heritage which is indeed their right as members of an Islamic civilization that has contributed so much to humanity. A heritage which is indeed a prominent part of their identity. If we do not re-visit it – of course with an analytical and critical mind – we rob our children of their very identity as inheritors of Islamic civilization.

The questions that this conference will address in the coming days as the Grand Mufti just pointed out are important for more than academic reasons. They are important for the Arab and Muslim world, but also for the world as a whole. He remarked: *“as we live, amidst economic and environmental crises, it is difficult not to make the observation that we as a collective need to consider alternative ways of thinking, knowing and being in the world – which at once honour our histories and traditions while refusing to engage in a romantic nostalgia for the past”*.

Again I reiterate my wish for you all the very best over the next four days in the lively debates and deep insights that sure to spring from this important gathering of students and scholars alike.

Thank you and peace be with you.

http://www.ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=148

Diversity of Juristic Opinions: a Sign of Discord? (Fatwa)

Source: Ali-gomaa.com

The publication of certain books that aim at getting people to adhere to the school of thought of their author while describing their opposition as being innovators, heretics, and astray, pose a threat to the unity of the Muslim community. There is no doubt that these books played a role in creating much of the fragmentation that we see and experience in this day and age. This does not mean that we should stubbornly adhere to our school of thought in opposition to theirs. Everyone has the right to present their opinion and consider it to be correct, but it is never permissible to accuse the opposition of innovation, going astray, and heresy, especially when the issues that they are denouncing have been accepted by scholars throughout the ages whom none of these people possess the effrontery to claim are astray. The most that they can do is oppose one school and follow another, which does not cause disunity within the community.

Discord and conflict occur when they persistently insist that their school is correct and everyone else is wrong. Nobody in the past or the present, in the East or the West, disagrees about what Islam is, which is what is necessarily known in the religion. Similarly, nobody disagrees concerning those issues about which the community has formed a consensus, which is the essence of this religion. Everything else are matters of interpretation, and Muslims are free to follow any school they like, as long as it is led by scholars who are qualified to make interpretations and examine evidence; no consideration is given to the interpretations of people who have not fulfilled its conditions and requirements.

There has been variance of opinions concerning matters that are uncertain since the time of the Companions of the Prophet. Imam Abu al-Qasim ibn Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr al-Siddiq said, “*God has caused benefit through the variance of opinion among the companions of the Prophet in their actions. Anybody who acts according to the actions of one of them will find himself with ample room and he would realize that someone better than himself did the same.*” Sufyan al-Thawri said, “*If you see someone doing something concerning which there is a variance of opinion, and who hold the opposing position, do not prevent him [from his actions].*” Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal said, “*The jurist should not make people follow his*

school or be harsh with them.” Ibn Qudama al-Makdisi, the Hanbali Imam said, “There are great Imams from the predecessors within this community through whom the principles of the religion were set and confusing rulings were clarified. Their agreement is evidence, and their variance [of opinion] is a vast mercy.”⁴ A man wrote a book about variance of opinion and Imam Ahmad told him, “Do not call it variance of opinion, rather call the book ‘Spaciousness’.”⁵ He also said, “When a mufti is asked to issue a fatwa, and his fatwa does not entail spaciousness for the one requesting the fatwa, he should refer him to someone who does have spaciousness.” If a scholar has certainty that those who hold opinions in opposition to his are wrong, it is not permissible for him to describe them as innovators or heretics, because holding an incorrect opinion based on a correct intellectual methodology is not described as such. This is how things have been understood by the great scholars of the past like Imam al-Dhahabi who said, “If we were to accuse every Imam who makes an error in interpretation, for which he would be forgiven, of innovation and ostracize him from the community, Ibn Nusayr, and Ibn Mundah, and those even greater than them would not have been safe with us. God guides people to truth, and He is the Most Merciful. We seek refuge with God from caprice and impoliteness.”

Ibn Taymiyyah said, “Saying that an issue is certain does not entail an accusation of those mujtahids who oppose it. This is like the rest of the issues concerning which the early generations differed and we have certainty of the correctness of one of the positions such as: the fact that the pregnant woman whose husband has died has a waiting period that lasts until she gives birth, intercourse with penetration but without ejaculations necessitates major ritual purification, riba al-fadl8 is forbidden, and temporary marriage is forbidden.”⁹ From what has preceded we understand that the variance of opinion between scholars and mujtahids who posses the requirements for making ijtihad in matters in which variance is allowed, is a great mercy bestowed by God upon Muslims. Things have been made broad for them and it is permissible for them to follow whatever is appropriate to their circumstances, and there is no doubt concerning this. That which brings about the fragmentation is the attempt at intellectual terrorism, coercion, and deception in order to give people the impression that what they are saying is the truth and there is no other truth beside it. This is a blameworthy innovation that is not part of the guidance of the predecessors of this community. May God grant us breadth in our understanding. And God is Most High and Knows best.

Book: The Epistemology of Excellence: A Journey into the Life and Thoughts of the Grand Mufti of Egypt

Source: Chapter 3: As a Jurist

The Grand Mufti of Egypt, Dr. Sheikh Ali Gomaa, is one of the leading Islamic scholars of his time. As a member of a family renowned for its piety and learning, the Grand Mufti imbibed both a love for knowledge and a concern for social justice at an early age.

Given his broad education in both the Islamic and secular sciences, along with his voracious appetite for reading and studying, his extensive travels, and his experiences interacting with people from all walks of life and from all regions of the world, it is unsurprising that Sheikh Ali should put on offer a number of innovative contributions in the fields that represent his primary specialty, Islamic jurisprudence and juristic methodology.

Intellectual Orientations

Sheikh Ali has long maintained that Islam arrived in the world to answer three fundamental existential questions: Where did we come from? What are we doing here? And what will become of us tomorrow? In other words, according to Dr. Gomaa, Islam concerns itself equally with the past, present and future, providing answers to the perennial questions of humanity independent of the vagaries of time and chronology.

This basic position underlies Dr. Gomaa's approach to the intellectual heritage of Islam, and the legacy of Muslim civilizational culture. The task of the contemporary Muslim jurist, then, is to cultivate a deep appreciation for the Islamic heritage, a legacy that finds its inspiration in the Qur'an and the Prophetic example, and its content in the vast textual corpus of the Islamic legacy. These textual sources have formed the basis for a civilization that has spawned innumerable achievements – scientific, artistic, and humanitarian. One must begin with a proper understanding of the legacy of Muslim civilization, and its towering position within human history, to address the needs and issues facing the world today. Sheikh Ali's basic approach to the juristic tradition is one of reverence and judicious selectivity. He maintains that the corpus of texts from the world of Islamic thought that have long been considered authoritative are guides for us in the present

day in as much as they lay out a methodology for interpreting the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions. This, however, does not bind today's Muslims to the specific substantive outcomes arrived at by previous scholars. Rather, the spirit of Islam demands new engagements and readings which render the religion relevant to the particularities of living in a modern world. The Mufti has long insisted on drawing a distinction between the essential, transcendent truths of Islam, and its contingent worldly manifestations. This is the sacred task of the Islamic jurist. With one eye towards the heritage of Islamic thinking and philosophy, and another focused on the realities of today's rapidly changing world, the jurist must mediate between the absolute and the contingent in a way that does justice to both.

These are, of course, weighty issues, and it is in view of their seriousness that Islamic societies have been restrictive in their granting of authoritative religious leadership to only those with the highest qualifications in both learning and piety. Experience has shown repeatedly that unqualified commentators fail to maintain the balance that is so definitive of the Islamic juristic culture, often leading to extremes, including violent radicalism of the sort that has so preoccupied the global community in recent years. The urgency of this balanced orientation is no doubt what has led to its growing popularity among a wide range of Muslim thinkers, to the point where it can now be considered a full-fledged school of thought, inspiring a culture of learning, rationality and fair-mindedness essential to remaining faithful to the tradition of Islam. The intellectual preoccupations and experiences of the Grand Mufti thus serve as a model for adherents of this school, and so we now turn to them.

Flexibility

The Grand Mufti has always insisted on the highest academic and scholarly standards in the service of humanity. His keen legal mind compels him to draw precise distinctions pertinent to the appropriate application of Islamic law, where some scholars are content to blur fundamental tenets with subsidiary matters. Holding fast to the priorities of the global Muslim community, Dr. Gomaa has been a vocal advocate for distinguishing between source texts and their interpretations, methodological principles and contingent rulings, the permanent and the ephemeral, and the transcendent and the contingent. Rulings, the Grand Mufti maintains, are subject to evolution and

development as a result of social change, differences in social customs, the spirit of the time, and geographical specificity. This flexibility is an integral part of the Islamic legal tradition- in deed; one might say it is one of the defining characteristics of Islamic law. Islamic law is, according to Dr. Ali, both a methodology and the collection of positions adopted by Muslim jurists over the last 1,400 years. Those centuries were witness to a remarkable intellectual diversity – no less than 90 schools of legal thought – and the twenty-first century finds us in the providential position of being able to look back on this tradition in order to find that which will benefit us today. This is one of the first steps in arriving at a legal opinion.

For Sheikh Ali, Islamic law is in fact one of the most important institutions in the endeavour to properly understand the relationship between Islam and the contemporary world. In an attempt to provide Muslims with authoritative guidance about their religion, jurists look not only to the vast legal tradition, but must also conduct a proper examination of the lived reality of Muslims, in order to provide them with relevant rulings. In effect, Islamic law represents the bridge between the long-standing intellectual legal tradition of Islam and the contemporary world in which we live. They are the link between the past and the present, the absolute and the relative, the transcendent and the contingent, the theoretical and the practical. For this reason it takes more than just knowledge of the classical texts of Islamic law to issue a relevant and balanced opinion. Competent jurists are required to have an in-depth understanding of the world in which they are living and the problems that their communities are facing.

In view of this emphasis on lived reality as an integral component of the juristic process, the Sheikh has outlined in detail the different types of considerations that must be taken account to capture an accurate portrait of this reality. The first part of reality is the realm of things which includes inanimate objects, as well as animals. The second is the realm of persons. In today's context, this includes natural persons, that is to say human beings who have a rational faculty, a soul, individual responsibility, and a reckoning before God; as well as "conventional persons," which is a term used to refer these days in particular to corporations to indicate their legal independence from the individuals who administer them. The third realm is that of events and happenings which occur around us. These include economic events, such as the fluctuations in the value of a currency; political

events, such as the decision to start a war; military events, such as an occupation of some land; or everyday happenings, such as the going-on of a conference in which participants are discussing some issue. Each of these occurs in some context: at some particular time, in some particular place, under some particular circumstances, and involving certain people. Each event, then, is a compound phenomenon, comprising all of these contextual elements, all of which must be studied by the jurist. The fourth realm of reality is the realm of ideas, including all of the comprehensive worldviews and individual points of view that circulate in the world.

According to Sheikh Ali, all four of these realms must be taken into account in order to arrive at a sensible opinion. More to the point, the jurist must remain sensitive to the various ways in which these components interact and the particular configurations they occupy in the case under consideration. It is clear, therefore, that the responsible jurist must be a figure who is in touch with the world, and responsive to the changes and developments it constantly undergoes.

Here is where we begin to understand the extreme significance of ensuring only the most qualified and erudite are considered competent to issue opinions. Dr. Ali has long been outspoken with regard to the disastrous ramifications of allowing unqualified personalities to speak in authoritative ways about Islamic law. When those who lack these qualifications issue fatwas en masse and with no regard to context, the result is the extremism we see today. For Dr. Ali, when each and every person's unqualified opinion is considered authoritative we lose a tool which is of the utmost importance to reign in extremism and preserve balanced understandings of Islam. We may point to any number of declarations posing as fatwas from extremists and terrorists as examples of how grave the consequences are of not following the historical Islamic example of differentiating between those with scholarly standing and authority, and those without. The Muslim world has been particularly successful at creating institutions and bodies whose long-standing service to the community confer upon them legitimacy that cannot be obtained simply by someone with access to modern media. According to Dr. Ali, this is no time to abandon that example. The flexibility emphasized by Dr. Ali Gomaa is not a new phenomenon. In fact, he believes it is has always been an in-built part of the Islamic legal tradition, and especially the fatwa-giving process. Scholars have long argued that fatwas are available to being

modified and updated as a result of changing circumstances (ahwāl), the flow of history (zamān), the reality of geographical diversity (makān), and different peoples (ashkhās). To demonstrate this, he points to the example of Malik b. Anas, one of the most famous personalities in Islamic history and the leading scholar of Medina in the second Islamic century. Imam Malik is well-known for his adamant defense of the right to free thought, even in the face of persecution. However, when he was approached by the Caliph of the time with a proposal to make his entire dominion subject to the rulings in Malik's famous Muwatta (a famous book on Jurisprudence), Malik refused, saying "*Leave the people of each locality to themselves and what they have chosen.*" Through this simple statement, Imam Malik set a precedent of intellectual and legal diversity in the Islamic world which paved the way for individual communities to adapt Islamic law to their own circumstances. This is the basic intellectual commitment that led to a vibrant culture of scholarship and tolerance throughout the centuries, and it is the one to which Sheikh Ali adheres today.

The Objectives of the Shari'ah

Another position that has characterized the Sheikh's approach to jurisprudence is his insistence that all rulings, in all their variety and range, all aim at serving the basic objectives of the Shari'ah (maqāsid al-Shari'ah) which have long been recognized by scholars of juristic methodology. These scholars have long maintained that a deep study of the rulings of the Shari'ah will lead us to five central values that the Shari'ah was revealed to protect: life, mind, reason, religion, honor, and wealth.

To arrive at these values, Sheikh Ali points out it is important to note that one of the fundamental concepts in jurisprudence is that of the legal cause ('illa). Jurists regularly consider the legal cause in order to be able to extend their rulings to others. In considering a given ruling, then, one can enquire as to the principle (asl) that underlines this ruling (hukm). In other words, what is the reasoning behind a given ruling? When we probe deeply into the series of causes, we will eventually find ourselves at a list of interests that the given rulings are thought to promote. These may be either explicit in the foundational texts, or implicit and arrived at through the intellectual exertion of a jurist. The ultimate list of Objectives that will be arrived at, according to the jurists, are the five we have listed above. As the fundamental

values of the Shari'ah, they are to be given priority over other considerations. Let us consider an example. Wine is considered forbidden. So, we may enquire as to why has God prohibited wine. The response from the jurists is because it is an intoxicant. Then, it may be asked, why intoxicants are prohibited by God. The response is because it compromises reason. The next question is why is it forbidden to compromise one's rational faculty. Indeed, the rational faculty is regularly rendered entirely absent when one sleeps. The answer to this is because God has rendered it responsible for our actions, and the mind/reason is the locus of responsibility. Therefore, compromising one's rational faculty unnecessarily is prohibited. The case of sleep is an exception due to unavoidable human necessity. This is a simple example. However, when one repeats this process on all the rulings of the Shari'ah, he arrives at a common ground which we know as the Objectives of the Shari'ah.

Among the contributions of Dr. Ali to the theory of Maqāsid al-Shari'ah is his translation of two of the values into terms that better reflect the terminology of the contemporary world. First, protection of honor (in some cases, it is referred to as protection of progeny) is bettered rendered in modern language, according to Dr. Ali, as human dignity, for "*honor corresponds to the concept of human dignity in their jargon.*" This precludes by necessity torture and cruel punishment. Secondly, Dr. Ali prefers "*protection of private property*" to "*protection of wealth*" because the former is a more inclusive term, accounting for intellectual property as well as tangible goods and real estate.

As well, Dr. Ali has suggested an order of priority to these values which better reflect their importance in the Islamic worldview. The highest priority is accorded to "protection of life" because it is humans who are the very locus of Shari'ah. If one forfeits life, all the other values are necessarily forfeited. Therefore, it takes priority. The second-highest value is "protection of mind" because, as we have seen, the rational faculty is the locus of all obligation and responsibility which defines the Shari'ah. This protection occurs on both the individual level and the communal level. For the former, we have seen the case of the prohibition of intoxicants. For the latter, however, there is a positive duty on society to provide education towards the end of building communities and civilizations. Third is "protection of religion" which seeks to preserve sacredness in mundane life. This value applies not only to Islam, but to all religions, indicating the strong Islamic

commitment to freedom of religion. The fourth rank of priority belongs to “protection of human dignity” which guarantees individuals’ rights to basic freedoms, such as freedom of opinion, freedom of belief, and the freedom to travel freely. Finally, we have “protection of private property.” This formulation, according to Dr. Ali, seeks to advance public order and justice, for these five protections represent values agreed upon by all civilizations and legal codes.

Legal Diversity

Legal diversity has been a feature of Islam since the very beginning. Among the Companions of the Prophet themselves, there were many recognized mujtahids. Consider the case of the Prophet’s wife, Aisha, who disagreed with many other Companions on some issues. Among these is her opinion that the cloth that was used to cover the Ka’ba may be sold in order to fund the upkeep and maintenance of the Sacred Mosque. Among successive generations, too, we find many great mujtahids. Each of these had their own principles guiding their interaction with the foundational texts of the Qur’an and Sunna. These led to divergences which over the course of centuries have led to a great treasure of intellectual and juristic approaches and opinions.

This state of affairs led to the question of how later generations ought now to decide between the various, often conflicting, opinions. Dr. Ali has explained that in the case of a jurist who has not reached the status of a mujtahid, he must choose one based on a due regard for the Objectives of the Shari’ah, so that he may take account of the interests of the people in the particular contexts in which they find themselves. As for the case of a jurist who has achieved the rank of a mujtahid, he is to perform his own ijtihad, looking to the findings of another only as a reference and a source for corroboration. As for Dr. Ali himself, he follows the example of the institution of the Dār al- Iftāa.

The Dār al- Iftāa began as a Hanafī institution, issuing fatwas on its dominant opinions, in accordance with the orientation of the Ottoman Empire. However, during the leadership of Muhammad Abduh, this was expanded so as to resort to Malikī opinions in particular cases in which it was not feasible to act upon the Hanafī position. Later, this was further expanded by Sheikh Muhammad Faraj Sanhurī who facilitated and encouraged making reference to eight different schools of jurisprudence, including some Shi’ite schools. Similarly, despite

Dr. Ali's special affinity for the Shafī'ī school, he feels it is appropriate to make reference to other Sunni schools in an effort to facilitate matters for the people, and arrive at the most appropriate rulings. He successfully mediates all schools of thought, deriving benefit from each, while presenting his own input that demonstrates his balanced approach. This approach, though nurtured by comprehensive understanding of classical text books, is rooted in the need to relate Islamic ethos to our lived reality.

Basing himself on these commitments, the Grand Mufti has produced an impressive body of work, including the publication of several scholarly books, consultative positions on some of the highest bodies of Islamic legal research in the world, appointments to the editorial board of a number of scientific journals and encyclopedias, mentorship to emerging scholars and researchers, and an engagement with the public worthy of a scholar and public intellectual of the highest caliber.

Dr. Gomaa has been a prolific writer from his earliest days as a law professor. In an effort to facilitate access to, and maintain interest in, the classical tradition of Islamic thought and especially Islamic law, he has for years taken a great interest in producing editions of some of the most famous works of Islamic law, jurisprudence and theology. An important example is the Sheikh's position as general editor of the Encyclopedia of Hadith, an ambitious project sponsored by the Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation to make the Prophetic traditions more accessible by making them available on CD-Rom, facilitating cross-references and links immensely.

In addition, the Grand Mufti has published monographs of his own on a variety of topics related to Islamic jurisprudence. These books demonstrate the Sheikh's range, and his ability to speak to a variety of different audiences. From simple fatwas for the everyday Muslim, to introductions to the discipline for beginning students and sophisticated treatises on technical points of legal interpretation, the Sheikh's output in his field of specialization is remarkable for not only its breadth, but also its attention to detail. In his role as a mufti, Dr. Gomaa has produced a number of volumes addressing specific problems posed to him by Muslims around the world. The most recent example of this is the two-volume series *al-Bayān*, which answers questions of particular relevance to present-day matters. Topics range from central

creedal beliefs regarding God and His Prophet, to subsidiary matters of dress and the permissibility of music, providing an easy reference for Muslims around the world when they encounter frequent questions. The Sheikh's belief is that jurists must engage with concerns that dominate the minds of contemporary Muslims in an increasingly globalized society have led him to write on two matters that are often at the root of misunderstanding between Islam and the Western world.

A staunch proponent of inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue, the Grand Mufti wrote an important work on the history of Jihad in Islam. This concept, oft-quoted and little understood, was subjected to a rigorous treatment by Dr. Gomaa. In this book, he clearly marks out its religious significance and history. Equally relevant to modern perceptions of Islam, and indeed of pressing concern to the Muslim community, are issues surrounding women. In order to address recurring question, the Grand Mufti has published a book of Fatwas for Women, as well as a wide-ranging overview of the status of Women in Islamic Civilization. In these works, he addresses common questions about such controversial topics as polygyny, spousal abuse, female leadership, the testimony of women in court, and a woman's inheritance. These are all issues that have been used to cast doubt on the ability of Islamic law to adapt to modern life.

The Sheikh's engagement with the public as a jurist is, of course, not limited to giving written fatwas. Even before his appointment to the position of Grand Mufti, Dr. Gomaa had become a well-known and beloved personality as a result of his question-and-answer sessions and public lectures in the mosques around Cairo. More recently, however, his interest in using the media to make himself available to a wider swath of the Egyptian and Muslim community has turned him into a veritable public intellectual. Today, the Mufti appears regularly on television to interact with his constituency by answering questions, offering commentaries and lessons, and contributing opinions and editorials to newspapers in the Middle East, Europe and the United States, on matters of social significance, such as the imperative to care for the environment, and the illegitimacy of terrorism. His book Salient Features of the Times is, for example, a collection of the Mufti's columns in al-Ahram spanning a range of topics of public interest. Similarly, Contemporary Fatwas from the Grand Mufti is a selected transcript of the Sheikh's question-and-answer sessions on an Egyptian talk show.

For beginning students, the Sheikh has produced an impressive array of works to introduce them to the religious sciences, and in particular his specialty, Islamic jurisprudence and juristic methodology. Maintaining that the Islamic heritage needs to be learned anew by a wider segment of the population, and not just Islamic scholars, Dr. Gomaa has sought to revive the Islamic legacy in an idiom that is both comprehensible and inspiring to budding researchers.

In particular, his work *Towards the Islamic Heritage* is an out-growth of a lecture series delivered to students in the humanities and social sciences in the hope of giving them the tools to work with the central texts of the Islamic tradition. In addition to this, the Grand Mufti has produced a number of works in his discipline of specialization. *The Discipline of Islamic Legal Theory and its Relationship to Islamic Philosophy* explains the centrality of law and legal reasoning to the Islamic worldview. *The Tools of Ijtihād* is a detailed explanation of the traditional mechanisms of deriving rulings from sacred texts, with an eye towards understanding how this process may be legitimately revived within the context of a modern world. In *An Introduction to Studying the Schools of Jurisprudence*, the Sheikh undertakes a historical discussion of the various Islamic schools of law, and the specificities of each tradition, in an effort to aid the student to navigate complicated texts and manuscripts. For their part, those who are already specialists and experts in Islamic law will find extended treatments by the Grand Mufti on all manner of questions of Islamic law.

These are often sophisticated philosophical discussions discussing the epistemological status of rival arguments, the hermeneutics of scriptural interpretation, the methods of reconciling contradictory evidences, or the question of what constitutes binding proofs like consensus or analogy. Dr. Ali Gomaa has long been recognized by his peers and contemporaries as a path-breaking jurist whose concern for everyday people guides his approach to Islamic jurisprudence and juristic methodology. His innovative approach has gained many adherents, and represents a strong hope for the future, and the ability of Islamic law to remain responsive to the needs of the present and future, a desideratum long recognized by Islamic jurists throughout history, and in severe demand in today's world.

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Chapter 9: Islamic Causes

Key positions:

- Centuries of writing and guidance testify to the fundamental notion that the jurist who is the most truthful to the spirit of Sharia is the one who is intimately familiar with, and so remains responsive to, the reality of historical evolution and geographical diversity, as well as the particularities of people's situations, customs and expectations.
- The State of Israel according to all relevant United Nations resolutions is the occupier of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and the Sheba farms in Lebanon.
- We witnessed the [continual] Israeli aggression, oppression, massacres and their offering the Palestinians the choice between death and death. This continued until the Palestinians cried out committing acts never witnessed before in the world. This is symbolized by the suicide attacks carried out by the Palestinian youth—Muslims and non-Muslims, males and females. It was not religious scholars who pushed these Palestinian youth to carry out such actions; rather it was the bitterness of their living conditions.
- As far as the situation in Gaza is concerned, we must not limit ourselves to providing means of relief, issuing statements, showing resentment and condemnation only. Rather, we must look back to the core of the Issue: the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian lands after 1967, the building of settlements, occupation of Jerusalem, muddling the issue by every possible means, objecting to the right of return of the Palestinian refugees; the on going excavations under al-Aqā Mosque to destroy it, based on an unverified legend which amounts to a form of religious exploitation using political means.
- It is now the time that the Muslim umma take seriously the need to revisit the long-standing boycott on visiting Palestinian territories under Israeli occupation, most prominently the sacred city of Jerusalem. For decades now, the issue of Jerusalem has been one of the most important problems confronting the umma, given both its sanctity to Muslims, as well as its symbolism of an ongoing and illegal occupation, which has imposed severe difficulties on its Arab population - both Muslim and Christian.

Articles & News of the Grand Mufti on Islamic Issues

Grand Mufti's Jerusalem Trip re-engages Palestinian rights

Source: Thenational.ae

It has long been a recognized principle among Muslim scholars that the beauty of the Islamic tradition lies in its flexibility and responsiveness, its ability to adapt to new circumstances and situations. This is in accordance with the paramount values of Islam. Centuries of writing and guidance testify to the fundamental notion that the jurist who is the most truthful to the spirit of Sharia is the one who is intimately familiar with, and so remains responsive to, the reality of historical evolution and geographical diversity, as well as the particularities of people's situations, customs and expectations.

It is in light of this well-established principle that we feel it is now time that the Muslim umma take seriously the need to revisit the long-standing boycott on visiting Palestinian territories under Israeli occupation, most prominently the sacred city of Jerusalem. For decades now, the issue of Jerusalem has been one of the most important problems confronting the umma, given both its sanctity to Muslims, as well as its symbolism of an ongoing and illegal occupation, which has imposed severe difficulties on its Arab population - both Muslim and Christian. There is no doubt that the issue of Palestine remains a pre-eminent concern of Muslims around the world, deserving of our most serious consideration. Nothing can distract the Muslims from our unmitigated support for a just, peaceful and enduring resolution of this problem, which restores to Palestinian people their land, respects their rights to their sacred spaces, and guarantees their safety and security.

These are goals that are widely agreed upon by nations around the world; indeed, they constitute the inviolable rights that are due to Palestinian people by virtue of their very humanity. The obligation for Muslims outside of Palestine is to continue to support them in this quest. In the past, it has been thought by some Muslim scholars that this could be accomplished by refusing to visit the sacred city of Jerusalem, or other parts of Palestine, because to do so would constitute an acceptance of Israeli occupation.

The truth is that the situation for Palestinians has only deteriorated over the past four-and-a-half decades under Israeli occupation. At every step, Israel has sought to weaken, marginalise and isolate Palestinian people from their neighbours and indeed from the rest of the international community. This is the underlying logic that moves Israel to oppose statehood for Palestine in the United Nations, to demolish homes arbitrarily, and to build a grotesque wall that separates Palestinians from family members, sources of income and other basic necessities. These are but a handful of obvious examples, but the list is endless. In view of this strategy, do we not owe it to ourselves as Muslims to reconsider how we ought to deal with our Palestinian brothers and sisters? Should we seek to further isolate them in accordance with Israeli plans and hopes? Or, should we instead seek to strengthen and deepen our relationship with them by demonstrating our solidarity, and our legitimate rights to the holy sites in Jerusalem?

Israel continues to devour more and more Palestinian land; to disenfranchise, displace and impoverish increasing numbers of Palestinians; and to assert greater control over the Muslim holy sites. This is the result of a 45-year occupation, which persists unabated, unaffected by the call of Muslim scholars to avoid visiting the Holy Land. So, is it not time that we reconsider this view without being accused of impropriety or of normalising relations with the Israeli state? Indeed, some of the greatest scholars of Islam - 'Izz b 'Abd Al Salam, Abu Hamid Al Ghazali, Taqi Al Din ibn Taymiyya - lived in Jerusalem during the occupation of the Crusaders. During this time, they never dared to prohibit other Muslims from visiting Jerusalem and its sites. Nor were they ever accused by their contemporaries of working for the other side, or of normalising relations with it.

To the contrary, when Al Ghazali visited the Aqsa mosque under the occupation of Crusaders, he found it still full of intellectual activity, with over 360 study circles populating its courtyard. Indeed, it is for the purpose of advancing the pursuit of knowledge, and in his capacity as a scholar - not as an Egyptian official - that Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa visited the Aqsa mosque earlier this month. He was invited by the Royal Aal Al Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought to inaugurate the Ghazali Chair for Islamic studies in Jerusalem. His visit was authorised entirely under the auspices of the Jordanian government, which is currently charged with the supervision of the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem.

Thus, Dr Gomaa required no approval from Israeli authorities, and his visit cannot be considered in any way a conciliatory move towards the state of Israel, which continues its transgressions towards the Palestinian people to this day. Indeed, the Mufti's full support and strongest resolve is with Palestine and its people, and it is with a view to expressing solidarity with them and easing their suffering that he calls for a more nuanced understanding of the situation today.

<http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/comment/grand-muftis-jerusalem-trip-re-engages-palestinian-rights>

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=113

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GAZA

Source: dar-alifta.org

The aggression witnessed over the last few days represents the latest in a series of Israeli massacres pursued over 60 years since Deir Yasin until Qana. This assault distracts our attention from the main issue: the occupation of Palestine. While people are busy searching out those responsible [for starting the latest conflict], exchanging a chorus of accusations including traitor, exceeding the realms of decency and protocol, no one talks about the core of the problem: the State of Israel according to all relevant United Nations resolutions is the occupier of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and the Sheba farms in Lebanon. In addition to this, it occupied portions of Southern Lebanon and Sinai withdrawing from both after tasting bitter defeat and it occupied Taba for years until international law declared its liberation by the will of Allah. No one can dispute these realities, not even Israel itself. However, these facts are not referenced by anyone with respect to the current situation. If Israeli trickery is persistent on pursuing a media blackout in order to leave matters as they are, we must not, in turn, abandon demanding our rights until we achieve them: Striving for Peace and Understanding the Reality

- We must aggressively pursue peace until the whole world seeks it complying with the Quranic verse: But if they incline towards peace, you [Prophet] must also incline towards it, and put your trust in Allah: He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing [8:61]. We witnessed the [continual] Israeli aggression, oppression, massacres and their offering the Palestinians the choice between death and death. This continued until the Palestinians cried out committing acts never witnessed before in the world. This is symbolized by the suicide attacks carried out by the Palestinian youth—Muslims and non-Muslims, males and females. It was not religious scholars who pushed these Palestinian youth to carry out such actions; rather it was the bitterness of their living conditions. Instead of studying such phenomenon and exploring its causes, many people in the world blamed Islam and the religious scholars as the culprits in this latest conflict asking, *“Is this among the teachings of Islam?”* We say: *“Has Islam or any of its scholars urged anyone of those young people to do this, or is a consequence of the social and political realities facing them?”* Why isn’t this question asked of Israel to whom we say, *“What is the reason that pushed these people to sacrifice themselves? What method of treatment caused them such frustrations and [to ultimately]*

carry out such actions?" When Muslim scholars, such as Sheikh ibn Uthaymīn, prohibited carrying out such actions, none of the Palestinian youth paid him any attention; when scholars supported them, there was neither increase nor decrease [in such activities]; and when scholars maintained two opinions, regarding its ruling, none of the Palestinians gave heed to them. Rather, such actions are nothing but the production of the bitter situation, the likes of which have never been witnessed in history.

Understanding the Root of the Problem

- As far as the situation in Gaza is concerned, we must not limit ourselves to providing means of relief, issuing statements, showing resentment and condemnation only. Rather, we must look back to the core of the Issue: the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian lands after 1967, the building of settlements, occupation Jerusalem, muddling the issue by every possible means, objecting to the right of return of the Palestinian refugees; the on going excavations under al-Aqṣā Mosque to destroy it, based on an unverified legend which amounts to a form of religious exploitation using political means. Recent Questions Regarding the Crisis

- Someone asked me: "*Is it permissible-during this calamity-to make Qunūt [En. Supplicating Allah to avert affliction] in the five obligatory prayers?*" I answered: "The Hanifi, Shafi' and Hanbali scholars recommend making Qunūt when Muslims are tried with disasters such as fear, drought or epidemic all of which are present in the case of Gaza. While the Hanifi scholars maintain that Qunūt should only be made in audible prayers—i.e. Maghrib, Ishaa' and Fajr, the Shafis maintain making it in audible and inaudible prayers. The Imam [in congregation] says the supplication aloud while the one praying alone says it to himself. Following the tradition of the Prophet [P.B.U.H], the duration of Qunūt should not exceed one month from the time the affliction strikes as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) observed it in this manner.

- He then asked: what should be said in Qunūt? We should say: "O Allah, rouse the Muslim community, bring Muslims together and unify their word, guide them to comply with Your commands and abstain from Your prohibitions, grant them success in doing all that which pleases You, rectify their faults, grant them means of power on

the earth, and help them to establish prayer, pay Zakāt, enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil. O Allah, protect us against temptations-what we know of, and what we do not know, grant us victory over our enemies as well as our whims, grant us success in establishing truth and guide us to the straight path. Amen.”

- In case of a new Intifād ahas a result of the endless Israeli pressure, the usual clamor against religious scholars should not be raised. Israeli leaders should realize that no one could be expected to abandon his religious sanctuaries, land, rights or keep silent in the face of such endless aggression. In our desires for achieving peace, we want one which is fair and permanent in order to give heed to administering the earth instead of being preoccupied with the Zionist's barbaric agenda.
- Finally, I call upon the Arab and Islamic worlds to cooperate with the Palestinian people with respect to their calamity resulting from the brutal aggression being launched by the Israeli occupation army. I also invite the International community as well as peace-loving forces to immediately interfere and end the unjust aggression made against the Palestinian residents of the Gaza Strip. The Israeli occupation army is committing a crime against humanity which necessitates the cooperation between the Arab and Islamic worlds to take a unified stance in face of the absurdities committed against unarmed civilians. In addition, the United Nations, as well as the International bodies, must immediately interfere to end the Israeli genocide, lift the siege placed on the Gaza strip and provide the Palestinians complete freedom in order for everyone to live in peace and security

<http://www.dar-alifta.org/viewStatement.aspx?ID=104&text=Israel>

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=scholary-output&so_details=91

Grand Mufti of Egypt known as independent religious thinker

Source: *The National.ae*

Sheikh Ali Gomaa, Egypt's Grand Mufti, has established a reputation in the Islamic world as an independent thinker who uses a deep knowledge of religious texts to take liberal and sometimes unexpected stances. His trip to Jerusalem on Wednesday to help inaugurate a new research centre was an example of what Abdallah Schleifer, an emeritus professor at the American University of Cairo, described as his "logical, clear way of thinking about modern issues". Mr Schleifer said Sheikh Ali's decision "*flies in the face of the standard position in the region since 1967 about not going to Jerusalem*" because Israel controls the city. It exhibited a belief that "*it is a form of moral, psychological and financial assistance for Muslims and Christians to start going on pilgrimage to Jerusalem*", he said. "*How else are they supposed to keep east Jerusalem Arab if the city is boycotted?*" "*He doesn't have knee-jerk reactions to things,*" said Mr Schleifer, who attended Sheikh Ali's Friday sermons in Sultan Hassan mosque in the late 1990s. "*What's interesting about him is that he arrives at his independent positions not by simply looking around and following the trend of others. He is so schooled in traditional Islamic literature that he is able to take different perspectives, based on the conditions we live in now.*"

Since former president Hosni Mubarak appointed him in 2003 as Egypt's highest religious official, Sheikh Ali, 60, has exhibited a willingness to challenge conservative ideas about Islam in the modern world using historic texts. He issued a fatwa that men and women have equal political rights under Islam, and that a woman has the right to be president. Such views have earned him criticism from Salafists, who adhere to a rigid form of Islam. Born in the Upper Egyptian city of Beni Sueif, Sheikh Ali obtained a degree in commerce from Ain Shams University and later a doctorate in juristic methodology from the Sunni Islamic university Al Azhar. During last year's uprising that eventually forced Mubarak to resign, he took a stance against the government and threatened to step down if attacks on protesters continued.

<http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/grand-mufti-of-egypt-known-as-independent-religious-thinker>

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=44

Chapter 10: Global Issues

Key positions:

- Sheikh Ali Gomaa is known as the “Green Grand Mufti” as and is included in the list of the most 500 prominent Muslim figures in the world.
- He is the first Muslim scholar to declare the city of Medina to be the first “green” Islamic city in the world.
- He is a staunch advocate for environmental sustainability and the close relationship between faith and ecology.
- Pollution and global warming pose an even greater threat than war and the fight to preserve the environment could be the most positive way of bringing humanity together.
- Sheikh Ali took a softer stance on the Saudi writer, who posted a series of tweets in which he imagined a dialogue with the Prophet on his birthday last month, and for which he has been widely condemned in some quarters of the Muslim world.
- The Grand Mufti, seen by many as a revivalist voice in the faith, said that given the opportunity, he would sit down with the young man “as a father would with his son”.
- “*We need to look at some points before we make any judgments,*” he said. “*Are we sure he really said what everyone is repeating? Secondly, we need to categorize the actual statements he made. Are they a form of misconduct, or an expression of doubt, or an actual insult?*”
- What constitutes an insult and what does not should be subject to investigation by the judiciary.
- Many internet users trusted the information they were given without checking the facts and the authenticity of sources. However, he said, society had a duty to have “*an open dialogue with youth, where we listen and talk to them on an equal footing*”.

•Sheikh Ali wondered How can we give someone unlimited access to the world and its different opinions, and then when that person gets wet from an opinion we may not agree with, we threaten them with the guillotine?"

•Although services such as Twitter risked creating "anarchy" by "promoting a break of values and links, like that of language, state, family, and religion, blocking access and censoring any form of social media was not a solution because "If you close one form of communication, people will find a way around it". Sheikh Ali Gomaa said.

•When it comes to the issue of weapons of mass destruction, Sheikh Ali believes that using these weapons is a serious violation to Islamic teachings as Muslims and non Muslims alike can be killed.

•He added that countries can possess nuclear weapons only as a deterrent.

Articles & News of the Grand Mufti on Global Issues

Grand Mufti calls for dialogue about the internet

Source: The National.ae

Sheikh Ali Gomaa, the Grand Mufti of Egypt and one of the world's most respected Islamic jurists, has called for greater dialogue and tolerance over the growing challenges created by the explosive growth of social-networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. He spoke out after calls for the execution of a young Saudi journalist over remarks he made about the Prophet Mohammed on Twitter, with Sheikh Ali saying: "*We don't kill our sons, we talk to them.*"

In a wide-ranging interview about how the Muslim world should help young people to confront both the dangers and benefits of the internet, the Grand Mufti called for caution and understanding, but rejected calls for a ban on social networking. Sheikh Ali made his views clear just days after the journalist, Hamza Kashgari, 23, was deported back to Saudi Arabia, where he faces charges of blasphemy and a potential death sentence. In an exclusive interview with The National, Sheikh Ali took a softer stance on the Saudi writer, who posted a series of tweets in which he imagined a dialogue with the Prophet on his birthday last month, and for which he has been widely condemned in some quarters of the Muslim world.

The Grand Mufti, seen by many as a revivalist voice in the faith, said that given the opportunity, he would sit down with the young man "*as a father would with his son*". "*We need to look at three points before we make any judgments,*" he said. "*Are we sure he really said what everyone is repeating? Secondly, we need to categorise the actual statements he made. Are they a form of misconduct, or an expression of doubt, or an actual insult?*" What constitutes an insult and what does not should be subject to investigation by the judiciary, he explained. "Thirdly, based on the opinions of a majority of scholars, if one repents it should be accepted. But it must be followed with good deeds." The Grand Mufti said the Prophet Mohammed was perceived as the ultimate subject of emulation by 1.5 billion Muslims all over the globe. "*Muslims throughout the world are required to venerate the Prophet by expressing their love and devotion to him. Insulting the Prophet is something that should not be taken*

lightly,” he said. Since making the remarks, the Saudi writer has deleted the offending tweets and cancelled his Twitter account. He has also apologised repeatedly and asked for forgiveness. Sheikh Ali said that based on what he had read, he believed the writer was “confused”, and added: “He didn’t find someone to share and settle his doubts with.” At the same time, the Grand Mufti cautioned that social-media sites such as Twitter and Facebook presented a bigger challenge for young Muslims and Arabs, who are now “*surrounded by a sea of information and misinformation*”.

He said: “*There is a great worry of them getting lost in the midst of all these waves.*” Too often, Sheikh Ali said, internet users trusted the information they were given without checking the facts and the authenticity of sources. However, he said, society had a duty to have “*an open dialogue with youth, where we listen and talk to them on an equal footing*”. “*We need to teach and help them to swim in today’s turbulent waters.*” Sheikh Ali referred to the difficulties young people face in dealing with what sometimes seems like an overwhelming amount of information, by quoting from an old Arabic poem: “It is like throwing someone all tied up into the waters and demanding of them to remain dry.” “How can we give someone unlimited access to the world and its different opinions, and then when that person gets wet from an opinion we may not agree with, we threaten them with the guillotine?” The Grand Mufti said he believed that services such as Twitter risked creating “anarchy” by “promoting a break of values and links, like that of language, state, family, and religion”.

“We see them putting under religion ‘none,’ and they are proud of it. Under the excuse of creativity, there is chaos and loss of values and community sense.” But blocking access and censoring any form of social media was not a solution, he said. “*If you close one form of communication, people will find a way around it,*” said Sheikh Ali, who has a Twitter account and uses the internet to communicate with followers. “*One of the problems we have today is that we are still using an outdated method of dialogue, both among ourselves, the Muslims, and with others,*” he said. “*It is in the form of ‘you accept my opinion or it’s the sword’.*”

On his visit to Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Ali gave a lecture to students at Zayed University and met Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The two discussed the role of Islamic scholars in guiding Muslims in their daily lives, as well as correcting misconceptions

about Islam and spreading the faith's message of tolerance and mercy. Sheikh Ali, 60, has been the Grand Mufti of Egypt since 2003 and is one of the world's most recognised Muslim scholars, largely considered a moderate in his stances and an outspoken advocate for gender equality rights. "*There is nothing in Islam preventing a woman from becoming a head of a state or president,*" he said. "*It is more of a cultural issue that still prevents women from reaching powerful positions.*" His better known fatwas included one forbidding the practice of female circumcision, which he described as "a deplorable inherited custom".

He also reiterated his position that there is nothing "in the Quran or Sunna" to stop women from driving. During last year's Egyptian revolt, Sheikh Ali welcomed protesters to his office at the Dar Al Ifta institute in Cairo, engaging them in debate about their problems and demands. Referring to the continuing conflict in Syria, he called the situation "complicated", and said: "*Each side is accusing the other of killing them. I tell all the sides, the ruling and the ruled over, that killing is haram, it is forbidden and needs to stop.*" Discussing politics and Islam's role in it, he said: "*Politics has two parts. One part involves taking care of a nation and its people. The other involves competing as parties for power. Islam in politics should involve only the first part.*" Using the Muslim Brotherhood as an example, he said: "*I told them you need to have a political branch if you want to compete for political power. You can't compete as a religious group.* So they formed a political branch called Hizb Al-Hurriya wa al-'Adala [Freedom and Justice Party]. *"People have voted them in to try them out and to see what changes they will bring,"* Sheikh Ali said. He added: "*Egyptian rule was always an Islamic state and has always been applying Sharia since the constitution was drawn up since 1923.*"

Despite the turmoil of the past year, Sheikh Ali dismissed fears of growing extremism in the region, and said "*there are always extremist groups in every human period*". "Islam is in a constant flux, where it is important for Muslims to keep an optimistic view of where it is heading by not worrying too much about mistakes done in the past, but rather focus on moving forward by doing good deeds and having boundless hope." Answers to where the Middle East may be heading "if it stays on this chaotic path", Sheikh Ali said, could be found in Herge's The Adventures of Tintin. The comic is set against the realities of a 20th century of power struggles and colonialism, a reality of the world that appears to repeat itself every 40 years, explained Sheikh

Ali. "If we continue in this chaos, we will go back to the time of masters and slaves," he said. "We don't need to spell out who will be the master and who will be the slaves.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=42

[http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/grand-mufti-calls-for-di-
alogue-about-the-internet](http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/grand-mufti-calls-for-dialogue-about-the-internet)

Egypt mufti issues fatwa on use of WMD

Source: BBC

Muslims should not use weapons of mass destruction and possess them only as a deterrent, a top Islamic cleric says. Grand Mufti of Egypt Ali Gomaa said using such weapons would violate Islamic teachings as Muslims as well as non-Muslims could be killed. He issued the religious ruling, or fatwa, following reports that the use of such weapons was legitimate, the state news agency Mena said. His ruling comes just days before the visit of US President Barack Obama. Mr Obama, who arrives on 4 June, is expected to give a speech on US relations with the Muslim world.

On a recent visit to Turkey he said the US was not at war with Islam and called for a greater partnership with the Muslim world. Cairo has said it does not want to make atomic bombs and in the past has called for a region free of nuclear weapons. Correspondents say that is a reference to Israel - the only Middle Eastern power suspected of possessing such an arsenal. Pakistan is the only Muslim country known to have nuclear weapons, although Western powers and Israel suspect Iran of trying to develop an atomic bomb. The grand mufti, who is state-appointed, said it was also not allowed for Muslims to kill civilians even during a declared war.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8076410.stm>

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=82

Green Profile: Interview with Ali Gomaa

Source: Egypt Independent

Al-Masry Al-Youm met with Ali Gomaa, Grand Mufti of Egypt, as part of our Green Profile series, in which prominent figures discuss pressing environmental issues. Al-Masry Al-Youm: How important is the environment within the Islamic doctrine? And in what way does Islam's doctrine highlight man's responsibility towards the environment? Gomaa: In the Islamic worldview, acting as Allah's deputies on earth means that we bear the responsibility of both conserving the environment and developing it, since almighty Allah has subjugated the world to serve us, and make us content. What subjugation means is that mankind has the right to enjoy the blessings of the earth and its resources. However, keeping in mind the Islamic worldview, we have no right to benefit from these blessings by exploiting that of others or future generations. We stand as masters over the environment, accountable by Allah the almighty and rewarded or punished accordingly. If we take good care of the environment, we will be rewarded with goodness, but if we abuse the environment and leave it to ruin, we will meet a frightful end.

As stated in the Quran, "*Those who break their covenant with God after it has been confirmed, who sever the bonds that God has commanded to be joined, who spread corruption on the earth --those are the losers.*" (2:27) Islamic law addresses the relationship between humans and the environment with the same binary view of rights and duties. Just as it has obligated us to conserve the environment and share it with others, it has also granted each of us the right to reside in a clean and beautiful area, where we can live in freedom and dignity. Islamic law has comprehensively addressed the issue of environmental conservation with several legal rulings which tie the development of the world with the general framework of religion. Furthermore, Islamic law always seeks to promote the well-being of both the individual and the community while aiming to place the minimum burden on them.

Al-Masry Al-Youm: In 2007 there was a fatwa (Islamic ruling) issued on the burning of rice straw in that it is prohibited in accordance with the Sharia. What other fatwas have since been issued that also relate to man's responsibility for the environment? Gomaa: In general, any act that can cause harm to the environment is prohibited in Islam, and the burning of rice straw is one of these acts that causes harm

to the environment and accordingly to mankind. In this particular fatwa, I requested government authorities to provide environmentally friendly alternatives to farmers to get rid of rice straw. Al-Masry Al-Youm: Late last year Jordan hosted a conference, which you partook in, entitled "Environment and Islam," organized by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought. Could you tell us what was the main outcome of this conference?

Gomaa: Actually, we discussed several issues throughout the conference, such as the role of the Quran, Hadith and Islamic values in giving solutions to environmental problems worldwide. Our main aim was to clarify and analyze the significance of Islam in protecting the environment from man's abuse. In addition, the conference shed light on Islamic values which call for conserving the environment and its components for the sake of all humankind. The conference was a good opportunity for more than a hundred Muslim scholars from 40 different countries to share and exchange opinions and ideas on environmental crises, which represent a worldwide problem. In my speech, I focused on the importance of adding environmental issues as part of the educational curricula, to include environmental pollution, climate change and global warming, which represents more of a threat than war; that is why we should give more attention to environmental issues at hand.

It is also worth mentioning that we discussed 38 scholarly research projects and the discussions proved to be informative as well as engaging. Al-Masry Al-Youm: In your opinion, what role remains to be played among religious scholars in order to give more weight to the environmental agenda? Gomaa: The community of religious scholars can play a significant role in spreading Islamic ideas that call for saving the environment from corruption and protecting it. This can be done through Friday/Sunday religious sermons and by attending different environmental conferences and lectures. Pollution and global warming pose an even greater threat than war, and the fight to preserve the environment could be the most positive way of bringing humanity together. Environment-related issues ought to be a significant component of religious teachings. It is the duty of all religious scholars to acquaint themselves with environmental crises we are facing. Al-Masry Al-Youm: In your opinion, what do you take to be the most important changes that people need to adopt today in order to live in harmony with the environment again?

Gomaa: Actually, the relationship between humankind and the universe is originally one of harmony. Ever since humankind's descent to earth, their intellectual and social development has been intimately tied with the extent to which they have acclimated to their environment and how well they have utilized the tools of life. Humans have an obligation to respect and cultivate their environment, and under no circumstances may they abuse it.

Muslims in particular should approach almighty Allah's creatures with an attitude of equality and partnership in worshiping the same God. Believers exude love for what he has fashioned from the love they hold for him. They do not differentiate between smaller creatures or more impressive ones, because what matters to them is the all-powerful and all-wise creator. Muslims even venerate and adore some inanimate objects because of their lofty station in almighty Allah's sight, such as the Quranic text, the Kaaba, and the grave of the Prophet Mohamed. Al-Masry Al-Youm: Lastly, what is the current role of Egypt's Dar al-Ifta in promoting an environmental consciousness within an Islamic view?

Gomaa: Dar al-Iftaa, besides its role in issuing fatwas, took part in international forums and conferences that tackle environmental issues, and is still planning for more cooperation regarding this issue. Recently, the issue of the environment has forced itself to the top of the list of international concerns, and the question of utilizing religious teachings to solve environmentally-related problems has become an urgent one. Dar al-Ifta has taken measures to reduce carbon emissions of its facility, and it is our hope to declare Dar al-Ifta a carbon-neutral institution by the end of 2011. We are in the process of getting this certification.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/green-profile-interview-ali-gomaa>

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=73

Medina to go green

Source: Telegraph.co.uk

Sheikh Ali Gomaa said it was a “religious duty” to go green. *“It is a religious duty to safeguard our environment and advocate the importance of preserving it,” he said. “Pollution and global warming pose an even greater threat than war and the fight to preserve the environment could be the most positive way of bringing humanity together. Environment-related issues ought to be a significant component of educational curricula. It is the duty of all religious scholars to acquaint themselves with the environmental crisis we are facing.”*

There are 1.4 billion Muslims worldwide and every year at least four million go on pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. As an oil-producing nation, Saudi Arabia has not been seen as a “green destination”. However the pronouncements of the Grand Mufti is likely to influence the deeply religious country and encourage millions of pilgrims to reduce their carbon footprint.

As a green city Medina will start using more renewable energy sources like solar power and conserving water in the desert region. Martin Palmer, Secretary General of ARC, said Islam has always had a “green” message but it has not been emphasised until recently. *“People think the environmental message has always come from the West but the message is now coming from Muslim religious leaders and their own religious texts,” he said.*

http://www.ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=144

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/earthnews/6487910/Medina-to-go-green.html>

Environmentalists recognized in prestigious list of the world's 500 most influential Muslims

Source: arcworld.org

Muslim environmentalists - including the 'Green Grand Mufti of Egypt' Sheikh Dr Ali Goma'a, who attended ARC's Windsor Celebration - are included in a list of the 500 most prominent Muslims of the past year. The 500 Most Influential Muslims has been published by the Jordan-based Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre. Sheikh Ali Goma'a, who comes 12th in the list, is the second highest Sunni authority in Egypt and one of the foremost Islamic scholars in the world. He is the legal authority for 80 million Egyptian Muslims and is said to have 30,000 books in his personal library. His office issues 5,000 fatwas (religious rulings) a week, with Sheikh Ali Goma'a crafting the most complex and important ones himself.

The 500 guide refers to Sheikh Ali Goma'a's comments about plans to make Medina the first 'green' Islamic city - which he made at ARC's Windsor Celebration in November 2009 - as an example of his outspoken comments on the environment. Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra reads from the Qur'an at ARC's Windsor Celebration, November 2009 Green Prophet.com, the Middle East's leading green website, described the Green Grand Mufti of Egypt as "a progressive and influential faith leader" who has highlighted the role that faith can play in confronting the ecological crisis.

As Moshe Terzman, a writer at Green Prophet, observed: "Sheikh Ali Gomaa has been outspoken on environmental sustainability. On November 2, 2009, on his speech at the Alliance of Religions and Conservation conference at Windsor Castle, Sheikh Ali Gomaa said that 'it is a religious duty to safeguard our environment and advocate the importance of preserving it.'

Pollution and global warming pose an even greater threat than war and the fight to preserve the environment could be the most positive way of bringing humanity together'." Fazlun Khalid, founder of the first green Islamic organisation, the UK-based Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES), is also included on the list.

Fazlun and ARC have worked together, including on a successful project in Zanzibar to engage local imams in persuading fishermen to stop the damaging practice of dynamite fishing because of its impact on wildlife and the environment. Read about it here. He has written books on the green ethics of Islam and Green Guides for Muslims.

http://www.ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=40

<http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=516>

Chapter 11: Feature Stories

Key positions:

- Sheikh Ali Gomaa embodies hope in a progressive and tolerant future, counterpointing many and varying hardline views.
- As a leading intellectual Muslim scholar, he has combined between being faithful to the intellectual heritage of Islamic tradition while keeping a close eye on the ever changing circumstances that Muslims are subjected to in their modern lives.
- He is sufficiently aware of perspective and context to answer questions about daily life, politics, economics, women's status, sociology, science, astronomy, sports and art in a breathtakingly modern spirit, demonstrating as much familiarity with the secular as with the religious world.
- He is well known for his scholarly endeavors and intellectual discernment which qualify him to arrive at new juristic rulings to cope with the fast paced features of our world today.
- He is a staunch advocate for renewing the Islamic discourse and to deal with it as an independent discipline among Islamic sciences which has its own methodologies, tools and goals.
- Opium of the people it may be for some, or a cosmetic dimension of the human constitution: Sheikh Gomaa believes religion is, contrary to all that, "an innate desire", almost biological, necessary for the well-being of humanity. He stresses that, since the European Enlightenment, secularism has palpably failed to satisfy people's needs, and cites the current global return to religion as evidence.
- He is a firm believer of the essentiality of dialogue as a creedal requirement which should be conducted on the basis of the love of God and neighbors.

Articles & News of the Grand Mufti on the Issue of Dialogue Michael Gerson on Egypt's Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa

Source: The Washington Post

Sheik Ali Gomaa, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, possesses a wonderfully exotic title, a scholarly manner and the unique burden of issuing about 5,000 fatwas a week -- the judicial rulings that help guide the lives of the Muslim faithful. On a recent visit to the United States, he explained to me the process of "resolving issues of modern life." And modern life offers Gomaa and his team of subordinate muftis plenty of fodder for resolution, from the permissibility of organ transplants, to sports gambling, to smoking during Ramadan, to female judges, to the use of weapons of mass destruction, to mobile phone transmitters on the tops of minarets.

This is perhaps the most difficult aspect of Islam for many non-Muslim Americans, who must look back to Puritan Massachusetts for a time when hermeneutics -- the art of interpreting a holy text -- was such a consequential public matter. In the West, theological debates have long been confined to seminaries, causing nothing more serious than denominational splits. In Egypt, Gomaa is a theological celebrity. His office, the Dar al-Iftaa, is part of the Ministry of Justice. And though his rulings are nonbinding unless adopted into Egyptian law, they are widely influential.

Reform in the Arab world is not likely -- at least soon -- to reflect the Western privatization of theological beliefs. All of life is subject to sharia law, and most Arab governments gain at least a part of their legitimacy by reflecting it. At its worst -- but rarely -- this involves the classical Islamic punishments of stoning and amputation. At its best, sharia law plays an equivalent role to the rule of law, binding both rulers and ruled by the same objective standard of justice. So it obviously matters greatly how sharia law is interpreted, and who does the interpreting. But Islam, for better or for worse, has no pope or traditional clergy. Instead, it has several schools of interpretation -- all of which view the Koran and the traditions of the prophet Muhammad as normative but reconcile local customs with Islam in different ways. Some, on the Saudi Arabian model, view the 7th century as the purest Islamic ideal, which is difficult to reconcile with modernity, pluralism,

democracy, women's rights and success in the modern world. Sheik Gomaa represents a different approach. He can hardly be called a liberal. "*The Egyptian people*," he told me, "*have chosen Islam to be their general framework for governance. That being the case, the Egyptian people will never accept homosexual marriage, or the use of illegal drugs, or the commission of homicide or joint suicide.*" Morality and its sources are absolute. "*The Koran and the tradition are what we depend on,*" he insists. "*They were true 1,400 years ago, they are true today, they will be true tomorrow.*"

But traditionalist Islam, in his view, is pragmatic in the way it applies these principles to "current reality." It is the job of Islamic scholars "to bridge the gap between the sources and life today." Some past interpretations "may have been corrupt -- we may find a better way. What we look to in tradition is methodology, not the exact results of 500 years ago." Gomaa focuses on "the intent of sharia to foster dignity and other core values," as well as "a commitment to the public interest." "*The end result is to improve the world, not destroy it,*" he said. As a result, Gomaa has made a number of rulings recognizing women's rights, restricting corporal punishment and forbidding terrorism.

"*Let me give you an example of the approach from freedom,*" he told me. "*The Prophet, in history, peace be upon him, wore clothes like what they wear in Sudan. The fact that the Prophet did that doesn't mean we all must dress that way. There are those who want to hold on to the past, not hold on to religion.*" Beneath Gomaa's interpretive approach is a strong assertion of the role of the traditional scholarly class within Islam. The issuing of fatwas by unqualified radicals has often led to religious chaos. Gomaa is a scholar of the first rank and believes that scholars, rooted in a long tradition of learning, should take the leading role in Islamic jurisprudence. His goal is not to liberalize Islam but to rescue orthodoxy from extremism. This does not amount to a fully orbed theory of human liberty. But Gomaa stands for an important and encouraging principle: Radicalism is the shallowest view of Islam.

http://www.ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=83

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/22/AR2009102203800.html>

A Small Miracle

Source: Newsweek Magazine

A year ago, 138 Muslim leaders from 40 nations addressed a plea for interfaith dialogue to the leaders of the world's Christian churches in a bid to diminish the influence of extremism around the world. That initiative, "A Common Word Between Us and You," led to a conference between Muslim and U.S. Protestant leaders at Yale University last summer and another last week with Church of England leaders at Cambridge University, to be followed next month by a meeting with Roman Catholic leaders at the Vatican. Ali Gomaa, who as the grand mufti (chief Islamic jurist) in Cairo is the senior Sunni Muslim figure in Egypt, was one of the Common Word signatories. He presided over the Cambridge conference with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. newsweek's Stryker McGuire interviewed Gomaa at a local hotel. At one point, their chat was interrupted by a carpenter's power saw. "That noise," joked Gomaa, "is from the sphere of terrorism." Excerpts: Newsweek: What signs of progress have you seen since the Common Word initiative was launched?

Gomaa: Meetings such as this one at Cambridge, working with Muslims and Christians because they represent much of the world's population, are a sign of progress. Our willingness to listen to each other is the first sign of the melting away of the iceberg between the two sides. It's really something of a small miracle. We need to go step by step. The massiveness of the current economic crisis is something else that we must come together to solve. A crisis in the United States affects the street trader in Cairo. We no longer have the option to live in isolation. We Muslims and Christians must be successful so that we can be an example to the rest of the world. We hope that Common Word becomes a massive international peace movement.

One of your goals has been to reduce extremism, including terrorism, in the Islamic world. Are the radicals listening? We have two objectives here. The first is to reach young people. That is where the problems begin and where we must begin. I equate terrorism with cancer. If we leave it alone, it will affect the entire body. The second involves the actual terrorists themselves, and our effort is to dampen their negative effect. In that regard we have been successful, but it's a partial success. We want to create boundaries for terrorism and restrict its activity. We've had a specific experiment in Egypt with the

people who killed [President] Anwar Sadat [in 1981]. In Egypt there were about 16,000 members of the group [Islamic Jihad] that was responsible for Sadat's assassination. We were able to discuss issues with them and convince them of their errors, and 14,000 of them ended up denouncing the principles of the terrorism they had espoused. You are an eminent legal scholar, and as a religious judge, you issue fatwas , or religious rulings, in all kinds of disputes. You ' ve said in the past that ill-trained or manipulative Islamic pseudoscholars have misused fatwas for their own ends. How so?

It is from these people that you get fatwas that endorse terrorism. That leaves the cancer to spread throughout the body. If Islam is not approached from a proper, scholarly point of view, we will see many problems. These ignorant "scholars" have been able to use mass communications, and now they have satellite TV channels and they're speaking night and day, constantly. This is very, very dangerous. We deem these ignorant people to be criminals. So why are they continuing to do this? They are doing it because the satellite channels give them the money and the resources to do it. It's a moneymaking proposition. All of us need to come together and to try to stand against this phenomenon. We believe in freedom of expression, but what I'm talking about here is a form of deception. It's not a right to hurt others and create havoc on earth.

The war in Iraq is a source of grievance among Muslims. If the war begins to wind down, will that help you deal with the extremists who use the war as an excuse to commit terrorist acts? Without a doubt. Military occupation is not something that's appropriate in our day and age. It can cause things to spin out of control. Sometimes there's a very fine line between terrorist activities and a legal armed struggle as outlined in the Geneva Conventions. When there's an occupation, there's a lack of balance, and then the concept of what's right and what's wrong is sometimes not understood by those committing violence or acquiescing in it. Do you ever feel you ' re in personal danger because of what you do? [Laughs] I don't feel that. The amount of love that I have in my heart for people allows me to feel there is no danger.

[http://www.thedailybeast.com/
newsweek/2008/10/20/a-small-miracle.html](http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2008/10/20/a-small-miracle.html)

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=70

Egypt's Grand Mufti Counters the Tide of Islamic Extremism

Source: US News By Jay Tolson

CAIRO—"Maybe we just need to buy CNN," says Sheik Ali Gomaa, more than a hint of exasperation creeping into his voice. After taking more than an hour to explain to yet another western journalist why a traditional conception of sharia law—along with knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence—is the best antidote to Islamic extremism, the grand mufti of Egypt is not able to disguise his frustration. Why, he wonders, does the West still not recognize who the moderate Muslims are, much less heed what they are trying to say? Shrugging his shoulders, he answers his own question: "The western media has paid no attention."

But it's even worse than that, Gomaa suggests. The West is aiding the most reactionary elements, the Salafis and Wahhabis, "out of political necessity," he says, alluding to America's elaborate codependent relationship with the oil-rich Saudis, who finance the vast outreach apparatus of the puritanical Wahhabi establishment. "And that," the mufti adds, "leaves behind our kind of Islam."

Rising from the conference table after a long discussion of his views about Islam and the contemporary world, the 55-year-old Gomaa cuts a stately figure in his Al-Azhar University scholar's garb, a dark caftan covering his white, ankle-length djellaba and a white and red cap atop his roundish head. As the grand mufti, Gomaa heads the Dar al Ifta (literally, the house of fatwas), a government agency charged with issuing nonbinding religious legal opinions on any question, large or small, that might come up in the life of a faithful Muslim. Part scholar and theologian, part jurist and administrator, he is a completely busy man—not least because his office issues some 5,000 fatwas a week, including both the official ones that he himself crafts on important issues and the more routine ones handled via phone and Internet by a dozen or so subordinate muftis. When not overseeing this operation, the sheik also appears on radio and television, participates in conferences, sometimes preaches and teaches (including at nearby Al-Azhar University, Sunni Islam's foremost seat of learning, where he was once a student and professor), and gives speeches abroad, mostly in the cause of promoting his broad-minded, pragmatic, and, he insists, traditionalist understanding of Islam and sharia law.

Ever since Osama bin Laden's minions committed their murderous acts, western politicians and commentators have asked the same questions repeatedly: "*Where are the voices of moderate Islam?*" Yet the West—including, more specifically, the U.S. government—has done little to locate or assist such moderates. In some notable cases, such as its denial of a visa to the prominent European Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan in 2004, Washington has even gone out of its way to insult them.

Western official ineptitude aside, a more urgent question remains unanswered: What influence do moderates such as Gomaa—and particularly those coming from the traditional learned class, or ulema—have within the vast community of Muslim believers? While Gomaa himself voices concerns about the rise of Islamic extremism in the West, he marshals a raft of statistics to support his view that respect for traditionalism is large and growing in the core of the Muslim world. These include a massive growth in the demand for fatwas issued by his office, a mushrooming of secondary feeder schools for the traditionalist Al-Azhar University, and the growth of Al-Azhar itself from three colleges in 1950 to 72 today. "*Can we say that the traditional ulema has lost its popularity?*"

he asks. (His broad confidence might be further corroborated by a new Gallup study, which found that 93 percent of Muslims from 35 different nations call themselves moderates.)

But other observers, including prominent Egyptian journalists and intellectuals, are far more skeptical about the impact of the mufti and other ulema, even within Egypt itself. They suggest that their association with corrupt authoritarian regimes lowers their standing among the people and taints their teaching. In light of such sharply differing views, the question of who will triumph in the struggle to define Islam is far from resolved. Adapting. One thing is absolutely clear, though: Gomaa's unshakable confidence—repeated as often by his protégés as by him—that the inherent moderation and pragmatism of traditionalist Islam make it far superior to anything proposed by puritanical Salafists or Wahhabis or utopia-minded Islamists.

Through the centuries and across cultures and continents, Islam spread and flourished, they all say, precisely because the principles of sharia were applied and interpreted in light of changing reality. Apart from supporting bedrock principles of the faith as set forth in the

Koran and the hadith (the authoritative accounts of the words and deeds of the Prophet), Islamic jurists sought to make the lives of Muslims easier, not more difficult, through their realistic application of religious law. As Gomaa sees it, what the best Muslim jurists have always done is to focus on the intent of sharia to foster faithfulness, dignity, intellectual growth, and other core values.

Called al makased, this method of seeking to apply the law through an understanding of its purposes is at the core of Gomaa's scholarship and jurisprudence and is being spread by his scores of students and followers.

http://www.ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=146

<http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2008/03/06/egypt-grand-mufti-counters-the-tide-of-islamic-extremism>

Come to a Common Word

Source: *The Ahram Weekly*

Sheikh Ali Gomaa is the grand mufti of Egypt and one of the world's most recognisable Muslim scholars. He has travelled the world, lectured to thousands, and composed over 30 works spanning Islamic legal methodology (*usul al-fiqh*) and contemporary issues. Since becoming grand mufti in 2003, Gomaa has been both an admired and at times polarising figure with each of his fatwas (non-binding religious edicts) closely monitored and scrutinised. His deep knowledge provides him with a rare optimistic outlook for the future on the condition of simple sincere work. His major interest lies in holding intellectual discourse with the West as much as building local and foreign capabilities at home. As usual it is not easy to meet Sheikh Ali Gomaa. A crammed schedule that takes up to 20 hours a day of hard work sees to that.

I've asked myself why it's difficult to meet Gomaa more than any other scholar especially after he limited his appearances on TV and in newspaper interviews, sticking only to his weekly programme on national TV and his column in Al-Ahram newspaper. He is not here and there on satellite channels and independent newspapers. In running Dar Al-Iftaa (house of issuing fatwas), he answers people's religious questions and issues fatwas, a vital job since Egyptians have a religious nature about them. However, is such a task so time consuming, considering his qualified board of senior muftis who can do most of the job? Gomaa is indeed busy, treading a new path of less talk and more work outside his range of specialties. He works collectively, not alone, slowly but steadily and scientifically, on his roadmap for peace for all partners of humanity.

This time I see a man who is not only issuing fatwas but also trying to improve services to upgrade muftis as well as local and foreign students at the Dar since its foundation in 1895. "*This post enables me to get closer to decision-makers worldwide and know more about the real life we are living in,*" said Gomaa, "*and this knowledge makes me think of ways to upgrade my staff to meet current changes, open new fields for the Dar to enlighten the country with different kinds of knowledge and services, and finally to change the stagnant life people live in with the work of faithful people around me. It's not just about issuing fatwas.*"

Since Gomaa is an academic, he resorts to intellectual discourse when talking to worldwide university scholars. And since he is a public figure of rich origins who has rich friends, he is helping the country stand on its feet financially, socially and mentally. In both cases, he wants the message of God to be delivered worldwide.

On the international scene, the business of clearing up the confusion surrounding Islam and Muslims in the West is important, largely a matter of discussing the possibility of integration with the West and emphasising the multiplicity of (Muslim) civilisation -- its humanitarian and cosmopolitan dimensions, its spiritual and material side, its flexible mode of government, its survival under non-theocratic states, and its handling of the global economic crisis. "*The rise of extremism in the Muslim world has led to the widespread view of Islam as a religion of violence, retribution and war,*" said Gomaa. "*This is in complete opposition to the truth of our religion. The vast majority of the 1.3 billion Muslims are ordinary, peace-loving, decent people.*"

Although these extremists try to persuade the world that the entire Muslim world is the enemy, and that a war on terror is a war on the entire Muslim world, Gomaa sees no success in such a trend. "Every day we win more and more friends and we get more and more respect. Look at Obama's initiative. We were recognised and doors of inter-faith dialogue are open to help deliver our message, so we have to seize the opportunity. "*The Quran tells us, 'O people, we have created you from a single male and female and divided you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another'. God tells us to know one another, not kill one another.*

"One of the problems in all religions today, not only Islam, is that lay people attempt to set themselves up as religious authorities, even though they lack the scholarly qualifications to make valid interpretations of religious law and morality. These interpretations are made in reaction to political crises, injustices, poverty and frustration, and our role as religious leaders who have spent our lives carefully studying religious exegesis, is to re-establish proper authority and guide the people accordingly." The latest Gallup polls show that 60 per cent of Christians worldwide harbour prejudice against Muslims while 30 per cent of all Muslims are prejudiced against Christians. That is more than two billion people out of four billion Christians and Muslims in total disliking each other or misunderstanding each other

(out of about 6.5 billion people on the planet). This is a recipe for worldwide combustion. "Something had to be done since out of more than 6,000 verses in the Quran, only 300 are related to legal matters. The rest deal with developing good moral character," noted Gomaa. There are over 60,000 Prophetic traditions and sayings of which only 2,000 are related to legal matters; the rest deal with the same -- developing good moral character. For over 1,000 years, Muslims have worshipped God, engaged in developing their society, sought to cultivate good moral character and built a great humanitarian civilisation. This is made clear in the Quran which says, "*He caused you to dwell on earth and to develop it*".

"From my long study of Islam and its history, I can attest that it is free of ethnic cleansing, religious inquisitions and forced conversions," said Gomaa. *"This may seem to contradict the popular contemporary view of Islam, but it is an opinion that has been confirmed by a study carried out by Richard W Bulliet who demonstrated that while the body politic of Islam spread quickly, it took hundreds of years for populations to convert to the faith. Islam was spread by love, intermarriage and family relations, not by the sword."* Since the world is living in tension, if not turmoil, and the situation threatens to get even worse, scholars like Gomaa worldwide put their hands together in "*A Common Word Between Us and You*" initiative to "*take arms against a sea of troubles*". Since its initiation two years ago, "*A Common Word*" has become the world's leading interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims and has achieved unprecedented global acceptance and traction as an inter-faith theological document. "In the Holy Quran, God Most High enjoins Muslims to issue the following call to Christians (and Jews -- the People of the Scripture):

'Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered [unto Him].' (Aal Imran 3:64)
"Thus in obedience to the Holy Quran," said Gomaa who is the co-chairman of the initiative, *"we as Muslims invite Christians to come together with us on the basis of what is common to us, which is also what is most essential to our faith and practice: the two Commandments of love."* "*A Common Word*" was launched on 13 October 2007 as an open letter signed by 138 leading Muslim scholars and intellectuals, including such

figures as the Grand Muftis of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Oman, Bosnia, Russia, Chad and Istanbul, to the leaders of Christian churches and denominations all over the world, including Pope Benedict XVI and the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams after Pope Benedict XVI's Regensburg address of 13 September 2006 which called for open intellectual exchange and mutual understanding. In their Open Letter to the Pope for the first time in recent history, Muslim scholars from every branch of Islam spoke with one voice about the true teachings of Islam. The signatories to this message came from every denomination and school of thought in Islam. Every major Islamic country or region in the world is represented in this message, which is addressed to the leaders of all the world's churches, and indeed to all Christians everywhere.

In essence it proposed, based on verses from the Holy Quran and the Holy Bible, that Islam and Christianity share at their core the twin "golden" commandments of the paramount importance of loving God and loving the neighbour. Based on this joint common ground, it called for peace and harmony between Christians and Muslims worldwide. In November 2007, over 300 leading US Evangelical leaders responded in an open letter in *The New York Times*. In the meantime, the Muslim scholars signing the initiative increased to around 300, with over 500 Islamic organisations and associations endorsing it. The 2007 initiative has led to a number of spontaneous local grassroots and community-level initiatives all over the world in places as far apart as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Canada, South Africa, the US and Great Britain. Over 600 articles, carried by thousands of press outlets, have been written about the initiative in English alone. Around 200,000 people have visited the official website of "A Common Word" for further details.

"A Common Word" has already been the subject of a number of MA and doctorate dissertations in Western universities, including Harvard, the Theological Seminary at the University of Tübingen, Germany, and the Centre for Studies of Islam in the UK. It has been the subject of major international conferences at Yale and Cambridge universities and Lambeth Palace; studied at the World Economic Forum in 2008 and the Mediterranean Dialogue of Cultures in November 2008; and was also the basis for the first annual Catholic-Muslim forum held at the Vatican in November 2008. The aim of the initiative this year is to move from "traction" to "trickle-down" with a major

independent institute being created to follow up its work; books and films being made about it; joint websites with approved Christian and Muslim reading lists being created as a basis for curricula; and a movement to bring it to political fruition. Gomaa recently addressed issues of globalisation and interdependence including the global economic crisis, global warming, the persecution of minorities in Iraq, and identified education as a priority for both faiths. He also discussed the different understandings of scripture, shared moral values, respect for foundational figures in the respective faiths, religious freedom and religiously motivated violence. He is against clichés used to perplex people and hinder progress of dialogue, like Islamophobia, the Other, and political Islam where he assures us of many examples of integration as opposed to a few cases of violence such as Marwa El-Sherbini's murder in a German court.

"Who said they utterly reject us?" says Gomaa. For 30 years Gomaa has been engaged in dialogue and has found much common space to cooperate. Scholars have established an association for developing Arabic handwriting with Germany, as well as an institution for arabesque which draws on the traditions of the Mamluk era. Along with Korea and Germany we helped develop the King Fahd Quran. "When we talk about interfaith dialogue, it includes civilisation, culture and maintaining good relations with neighbouring countries. This entails cooperating in various fields, whether economic, political, social, scientific or humanitarian. As for the differences between faiths, they are not subject to debate. I am not engaged in a religious discourse but rather in a dialogue [between faiths], and there is a huge difference between the two.

While a religious dialogue adopts the technique of looking for commonalties that include ethics, interests, life-related matters, etc... [religious] debate is where we academically scrutinise the details of each faith away from the spotlight and the media." "That is why this is a good method of correcting some of the misconceptions people have about Islam. And it clarifies, to ourselves as well as to the world, who we are. We might be in a state of slumber but we are not dead. We can rise again with positive contributions from all members of Muslim communities here and in the Muslim world and indeed the whole world." On the other hand, Gomaa likes some words like wassatiya, or middle way. In the Quran it has a very gentle and subtle meaning. God says, "*We have appointed you a nation of the middle way so you can be*

witnesses unto mankind, and so the Prophet can be a witness unto you" (Quran 2:143). Some scholars say that this word, wassat, or middle, is the pinnacle of the mountain. As you ascend the mountain and then descend, the pinnacle is in the middle. And while we are on top of the mountain, we can see everyone and everyone can see us. Another word used in this verse is (witness), which means the one who is seen, and is not restricted to the one who is seeing. It is a strange word that brings both these concepts together. It indicates interaction between you and others. This idea of witnessing, of being a witness, has a very deep civilisational meaning. "*We have to understand that we are a people of an open religion; we have no secrets. Our relationship with others is based on this example. This is what is meant by love of God and love of one's neighbour,*" Gomaa said.

As of late the role of Dar Al-Iftaa has moved beyond issuing fatwas to Gomaa taking part in international forums and conferences on issues such as the environment. Since 2008, International Environment Year, the environment has forced itself on top of the list of international concerns, and the question of how to utilise religious teachings to solve environment-related problems has become a priority in Gomaa's agenda since in this context Islamic teachings and rules are extremely rich. "It is a religious duty to safeguard our environment and advocate the importance of preserving it. Pollution and global warming pose an even greater threat than war and the fight to preserve the environment could be the most positive way of bringing humanity together. Environment-related issues ought to be a significant component of religious teachings. It is the duty of all religious scholars to acquaint themselves with the environmental crisis we are facing.

"Humankind is not free to consume or pollute carelessly. Preserving nature and preventing corruption on earth is one of the core responsibilities of all believers. The Quran changed the hearts and minds of its followers when it dawned on the Arabian Peninsula, enriching humankind and providing a vivid lens through which we can look at nature. Today, at a time of environmental crises, the Quran can once again play a pivotal role and provide those of us who believe in its truth, and are ready to open our hearts and minds to its teachings, with a fresh perspective and consciousness of nature." Putting theory to practice, Dar Al-Iftaa was the first establishment in Egypt to be declared carbon-free. Just as important as dialogue and integration with the West is issuing fatwas for Muslims in Egypt and spreading

moderate religious culture and awareness. "In Imam Mohamed Abdu's time [1899-1905], he issued no more than 942 fatwas. Now we issue more than 1,000 fatwas a day. Taking population growth into account, this means 1,800 fatwas to each issued by Imam Abdu. Where, then, is the separation between scholars and the public? If anything, this change is evidence of spiritual need and definitely not separation." Gomaa evidently feels the need for Dar Al-Iftaa, the traditional stronghold, to compete with various, seldom reliable sources of strange fatwas. "When each and every person's unqualified opinion is considered a fatwa, we have lost a tool that is of the utmost importance to rein in extremism and preserve the flexibility and balance of Islamic law."

Only scholars can pronounce, and even then they must have two skills besides a deep understanding of the law: knowledge of reality, and the ability to apply the law to it. They can debate among themselves, and a Muslim has every right to take or leave what they offer. A ruling in scripture is eternal and unchanged; a fatwa is a pronouncement on how to apply it, and it must take into account not only time and place but the people to whom it is being applied and the state they are in. It is public figures giving in to "the superstitious attitude" and talking religion that must be combated. In this connection, Gomaa has taught two generations of muftis. A recent course was conducted for young female Azharites and religious graduates. Another was for religious British students. Targeting awareness and building capacities more than bothering himself with the game of politics that has many definitions, Gomaa's interest is in real life change and legal opinion.

Gomaa wants to revive the waqf (foundation) system, overseeing zakat (the legal charity system of Islam), community integration and improving understanding. "There is no problem with a political movement but I think social, economic and intellectual movements should have priority. As a human being, the mufti has a political stance and a vision but in his job he cannot belong to one group or party at the expense of another." Dar Al-Iftaa is nominally part of the Ministry of Justice but has full autonomy and is not allowed to interfere with the work of secular courts or government policies. That's why there was no strong stand during the Israeli attacks on Gaza in December 2008, no press release on judaising Jerusalem, and a simple humble diplomatic answer to the writer Sayed El-Qimni's case without mentioning his name.

The latter case needs more clarification. Gomaa was accused of issuing a statement which allegedly declared the Egyptian writer El-Qimni an infidel and calling for him to be slain for insulting the Prophet and God. The accusation was patently false and a press release was issued to make things clear to the public. While there may be some extremist elements in Egypt that made such statements, Gomaa and Dar Al-Iftaa are not among them. In fact, it was only two years ago that Gomaa issued statements to the effect that apostasy is not punishable by death in Islam, a position that he holds to this day.

On 25 June this year El-Qimni was presented with the State Award for Social Sciences. This angered many Muslims in Egypt who consider his work offensive to Islam. As a result, a question was sent to Dar Al-Iftaa concerning the awarding of prizes to individuals who insult Islam and the Prophet Mohamed. The fatwa replied that awards and honours should not be given to those who insult and defame Islam. Noticeably, there was no mention of specific individuals, events or awards. There is also no mention of a death sentence or incitement to harm El-Qimni. The fatwa, rather, calls for a recourse to legal channels of reparation. "The role of fatwas is not to condemn, punish, or sentence people to death. That is the role of the judiciary. Fatwas clarify the legal status of actions without considering those involved or making any pronouncements concerning them as individuals. They are not death threats. "We do not involve ourselves in disputes with any kind of group and we will not stand in judgement of their intellectual output. We distance ourselves from allowing our fatwas to be used as a means of revenge in political games against certain individuals.

"Muslims have formed a consensus that whoever curses the Prophet (may peace and blessings of God be upon him) or slanders the religion of Islam has departed from Islam and the Muslims and deserves to be held accountable in this world and to be punished in the afterlife. Article 98 of the penal code criminalises anyone who depreciates or insults one of the heavenly sent religions, one of their sects, or causes harm to the unity of the nation or the peace of society. "This fatwa was meant to forbid the honouring of individuals who defame Islam. It did not in any way refer to the writer El-Qimni. It was a general fatwa."

Gomaa tries to revive Islamic teachings at home. He plays an important social role of change. He is, for example, the founder of the Egypt Goodness Foundation and a major player in the Food Bank, and this attitude reflects the integrity with which he handles the widest range of issues facing the country, whether in the press, television or the worldwide web.

Misr Al-Kheir, Egypt Goodness Foundation, founded in 2007, is a non-profit foundation that strives to eradicate poverty throughout Egypt by way of intelligent investments of its donations and a rapid method of dispersal. Since this is all predicated on the need for a sound organisational structure and expertise, Misr Al-Kheir has brought together for the first time in Egypt much needed talent from the international business community. Misr Al-Kheir also seeks to revive an operable concept of continuous donations and religious endowments that can serve as a force in its fight against poverty.

"We all need to learn from history and call people to work for the betterment of our societies for our children and grandchildren in a manner in which all are given their due respect and recognise their duties to one another. Let's love ourselves and love the other and build bridges of understanding to reach human integration on the earth that we share. It's time to work on the recipe, to know and act positively, and to live by Islam," Gomaa concluded.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=72

<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2009/965/euter.htm>

Master of Moderation

Source: The Ahram Weekly

Since becoming grand mufti in 2003 Sheikh Ali Gomaa has been both a controversial and quietly impressive figure. He has become a media fixture, with each of his fatwas (religious edicts) closely monitored and scrutinised. Whether they attract support or opposition, few question the scholarly knowledge that informs his judgements. Yet despite such unprecedented attention the grand mufti remains, for many, an enigmatic figure. It is no secret that there are those who reject his moderation, wanting, instead, a much tougher stance on what they consider the burning issues of the day.

In an exclusive interview with Egypt's grand mufti, Jailan Halawi discovers that the scholar has more to offer than meets the eye

Looking back at the five years since you first became Egypt's grand mufti, do you remember any instance of issuing a fatwa that seemed in opposition to the government and/or its policies? Dar Al-Iftaa Al-Masriya [The house in charge of issuing religious edicts] does not consider what might be with or against the government. Dar Al-Iftaa is assigned with clarifying Sharia rule. When we receive a question we provide an answer. Whether the answer pleases the government or accords with its policies does not concern us. The mufti, like a judge, does not follow up on his rulings. When a judge issues a ruling he does not debate, discuss or justify it. Whether the people welcome or deny it does not impinge on the judge, neither on the mufti. He issues his fatwas in accordance with what pleases Allah and following the rules he was taught throughout his academic life. A fatwa should conform with the sources of Islamic legislation and fulfil its [Islamic legislative] targets while taking in consideration the prevalent norms.

The new child law raised a lot of debate, not least because some of its articles, such as raising the legal age of marriage to 18, contradict with Sharia. The law was not sent to us and Dar Al-Iftaa was not requested to give an opinion. [It] was taken to the Islamic Research Centre, which gave an opinion. But what do you think of raising the age limit for marriage to 18 years? I would have to read the law, its explanation, and know its aims in order to be able to give an opinion. You said recently that you were not familiar with the details of the agreement under which Egypt exports gas to Israel and hence abstained

from issuing a fatwa on the subject. What kind of information do you need in order to issue one? I did not abstain. I differentiated between abstract acts and multi-faceted behaviour. In the case of an abstract act we can rule on it immediately because it is not linked to a specific time, place, people or conditions. Such is the case when asked about a personal issue about which all the circumstances are clear at hand. It is not the case with more complex behaviour which involves time, place, people and conditions the intricate details of which I need to be aware before I can give an opinion for a fatwa. A fatwa is not a political ploy. It is speaking in the name of Almighty. Hence a Mufti should be fully aware of the crux of the situation he is issuing a fatwa for, and if not, it is his duty to teach people how to ask before giving his response.

What kind of information would you need to respond to this question?

Issues raised in the media... [Is the deal] agreed upon by virtue of the Camp David Agreement?... Is such supply in favour of Egypt? If Egypt does not export gas to Israel, could that expose the country to war? Were the prices set subject to other international agreements? Could this gas be promoted through other means and in other markets? Endless questions to which until I have an answer I cannot give a fatwa.

And what of the argument that exporting vital energy to a country in conflict, or at war with any Islamic nation, is forbidden under Islamic legislation? It is a point of view not a fatwa. Under Article 2 of the constitution in May 1980 Islamic Sharia became the main source of legislation in Egypt. Since then a committee has reviewed all legislation to ensure that it conforms with Sharia. But isn't there a discrepancy between Article 2 of the constitution and laws that fail to conform with Islamic Sharia? The criminal law, for example, does not apply hodoud (Islamic penalties) and allows the sale of alcoholic beverages to Egyptians, etc...

The Egyptian criminal law does not allow the selling of alcoholic beverages. Yet they are sold in the market... They are sold, yes. But the law does not stipulate that Egypt has to sell alcoholic beverages. Equally, there is no law forbidding the trade of alcoholic beverages. Likewise, there is no law forbidding homosexuality. And yet was homosexuality approved by Egyptians?

Never. Please note the difference between the structured laws and the society in which we dwell. Such society is governed by a strong rule, that of religion, whether Islam or Christianity. Hence [it did not occur to legislators] to mention that, for it could not cross their minds that people could commit such horrific crimes.

In my book Al-Tagroba Al-Masriya (Egyptian Experience), and in many other publications, I have clarified the fallacy that Egyptians do not apply Islamic Sharia. There is a trend that assumes it is the ruler's duty to redistribute wealth in cases where many members of society live below the poverty level side by side with the extremely rich. Given Islam's respect of private property, do you approve of such a view?

Islam reveres personal ownership as sacred and views liberties in the same way. We cannot enforce such a method by force of law or, as a general rule, by confiscating property. Such [re-distribution of wealth] should rather be accomplished as an inseparable part of civil society's work, not that of the government. It is civil society that should pressure the wealthy to turn back [to the needy] part of their surplus income. Prophet Mohamed, peace be upon him, said: "*By Allah, by Allah, by Allah, he who sleeps with a full-stomach while his neighbour is hungry is not counted amongst believers.*" Here the prophet linked the issue with faith in Allah. This is a grave matter and must not be taken lightly. Yet we can never scare people from establishing projects that would help overcome unemployment [by speaking of confiscation].

The experience of confiscation [under the late president Gamal Abdel-Nasser] was a bitter one of which I totally disapprove. At the same time I am wholeheartedly against a single person in Egypt sleeping on an empty stomach. We will be held responsible [for the sufferings of the poor]. [Poverty] will only be solved through a serious movement by civil society and charitable organisations along with the means stipulated by Prophet Mohamed like zakat, or alms, and sadaqa and donations, which go from the hands of the haves to those of the haves not directly. That is not to say that we are the poorest country, but to say that the percentage of poverty [we have] is unacceptable. We must combat it and break its vicious circle until we ensure there is not a single poor person in Egypt. Do you think allowing Christian missionaries and the establishment of churches might remove a barrier before interfaith dialogue and hence be acceptable under Islamic legislation?

Let me quote the words of a prince who advocated [interfaith] dialogue: "*Even if clergymen would permit the missionary we would not*". The issue is concerned with national security. In one of his meetings with Protestant priests, Milad Hanna said: "*Let each of us do with what we already have because missionaries could raise conflicts more disastrous than a plague.*" There is no missionary concept among Orthodox Coptic Christians, only among Protestants. We are not against it to curb freedoms but because it is a matter of national security.

Is there any point in interfaith dialogue at a time when the other clearly disapproves of us?

The other is a vast word that includes many who approve of us, with whom we cooperate and share in common projects aimed at the development and well-being of humanity, and those who take a Fas-cistic stance towards us. The term other is extremely vast. For 30 years we have engaged in and have found a lot of common space to cooperate and have indeed cooperated. We have established an association for developing Arabic handwriting with Germany, as well as an institution for decoration and arabesque which draws on the traditions of the Mameluke era. Along with Korea and Germany we helped develop the King Fahd Quran. Who said they utterly reject us? When we speak with youth, we advocate they cooperate with the other while holding on to their faith and religion. We teach them how to invest in the common ground they share to advance humanity. Since 97 per cent of Islam is based on the advocacy of good manners we have a lot to share with other civilisations. When we talk about interfaith dialogue it includes civilisation, culture and keeping good relations with neighbouring countries and this entails cooperating in various fields, whether economic, political, social, scientific or humanitarian.

I look for the common. As a religious scholar I should not let [differences in] religion deprive me of the enjoyment of sharing in common projects. As for the differences between faiths, they are not subject to debate. I am not engaged in a religious discourse but rather in a dialogue [between faiths], and there is a huge difference between the two. While a religious dialogue adopts the technique of looking for commonalties that include ethics, interests, life-related matters etc... [religious] debate is where we academically scrutinise the details of each faith away from the spotlight and the media.

It is the common humanitarian aspect that we discuss. We tell those of other faiths and followers of religion, don't make of your religion an impediment to reaching for the common in order to benefit our children and grandchildren and live in peace, cooperation and love. With the rise of political conflict between Iran and Hizbullah on one hand, and the United States and Israel on the other, the Shia-Sunni relationship has come to the fore. Is it our duty to support the Shias, or do sectarian differences demand we deal with them cautiously?

The Shias have always been part of the Islamic Umma (nation). However, they are a minority that do not exceed 10 per cent of the total number of Muslims. Shias are by default a progressive sect. They acknowledge being progressive. They consider reality an inseparable part of their jurisprudence. I fully support developments in the Shia sect in 2008. [But] there are those who dig in old Shia books and emerge with conflicts... that is a grave mistake for it ruins the relationship and fails to recognise that the Shia sect is by definition progressive and is now a sect with which we can cooperate. Lately the role of Dar Al-Iftaa has moved beyond issuing fatwas to you taking part in international forums and conferences on subjects such as the environment. Are you doing this in your capacity as the grand mufti or as a religious scholar?

The world is interested in the environment and 2008 was named International Environment Year. The issue of the environment has forced itself to the top of the list of international concerns and the question of how to utilise religious teachings to solve environment-related problems has become an urgent one. In this context Islamic teachings and rules are extremely rich. It is a religious duty to safeguard our environment and advocate the importance of preserving it. Pollution and global warming pose an even greater threat than war and the fight to preserve the environment could be the most positive way of bringing humanity together. Environment-related issues ought to be a significant component of religious teachings. It is the duty of all religious scholars to acquaint themselves with the environmental crisis we are facing. Although on top of creation, human beings are only members of the community of nature and we are as responsible for preserving the environment as we are for our families. Human beings are the vicegerents of God on earth and will be judged in the hereafter for their actions and held accountable for the way they handled the environment. Humankind is not free to consume or pollute carelessly.

Preserving nature and preventing corruption on earth is one of the core responsibilities of all believers. The Quran changed the hearts and minds of its hearers when it dawned on the Arabian Peninsula, enriching humankind and providing a vivid lens through which we can look at nature. Today, at a time of environmental crisis, the Quran can once again play a pivotal role and provide those of us who believe in its truth, and are ready to open our hearts and minds to its teachings, with a fresh perspective and consciousness of nature.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=69

<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/914/intrvw.htm>

The People's Mufti

Source: Egypt Today

I'VE MET THE mufti before, but always in a secondary capacity, and never had I been the sole object of the undivided attention of a man known to be scarily intelligent and blunt, with a short attention span for fools. Our interview was scheduled for noon, and at 11:30 on the dot I was at Dar Al-Ifta, the nation's —and, by extension, Sunni Islam's —highest body for the interpretation of religious law. I was shepherded into a very small side office where the photographer and I struck up a conversation with the two men. An hour later we were still there, having progressed from drinking tea to a debate about the nature of preaching and what makes a sheikh a good sheikh.

We were interrupted by Dr. Ibrahim Negm, the mufti's spokesman and media advisor, telling us that it was time to go in. And although I had been speaking with him by phone for weeks to arrange this interview, it was only when I saw him that I realized why his name was so familiar: I had attended a four-day workshop Negm gave about Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH) to a packed audience of hundreds a couple of months ago. I had been too intimidated to approach him afterwards. A scholar in his own right, and he was the mufti's media advisor? My trepidation mounted. Hurrying along to the mufti's office, Negm apologized for the delay, explaining that the mufti's interview with Al-Arabiya, the satellite television channel, had run over. Cameras, cables and crew were still milling around the office as we walked in, the fully made-up presenter still arguing energetically with the mufti. He'd reply and she'd ask another question, which he'd answer wearily. He caught sight of us and said, in reference to her questions, "What can I do, yaani?" with a twinkle in his eye, and motioned for me to sit down.

East an West

Ali Gomaa has proven himself to be one of the most explicitly anti-extremist clerics in mainstream Sunni Islam. An outspoken critic of extremist ideologies and a leading advocate of moderation, he is a strong believer in dialogue who travels around the world on da'wah (preaching, or outreach) missions. He spends a considerable amount of time in London —a hotbed of European extremism — which he's been visiting for the past three years.

The mufti believes Muslims in Western countries should aim to be productive members of society and shouldn't isolate themselves. Isolation, after all, leads to miscommunication on both sides. "The Muslim in Western countries," he tells us after his TV interviewer finally left us, "faces a distorted perception of Islam in Western mentality, where there is a predisposition to rejecting hearing anything about Islam because of historical accumulation, media campaigns and the actions of some Muslims who unwittingly do things without thinking of the repercussions of their actions that result in confirming this distorted image or further distorting it."

The solution, he explains, is to "fix the image that Westerners have of Islam by having the patience to endure their impatience and building bridges with them." Dialogue, he asserts, is a very important tool. "It's pros are that each side can start to understand the other, to dissolve many of the barriers, and can correct their images of the other. But," he cautions, "the problem is when each side tries to dominate and maneuver the dialogue in an attempt to control the other. That's when the dialogue loses its meaning." Is it realistic to expect the West's image of Muslims to change in our lifetimes? "*Insh'Allah*," he says. "*Insh'Allah they will progress. There are examples of Muslims whose contribution to Western civilization is clear. Some of them have been awarded the Nobel Prize, others are making great contributions to research. The Muslim ummah (community) needs to rise one more time and they have the ability to do so. They just need to contribute to human civilization.*"

But is it really that simple? Does the Muslim ummah have the ability to stick to its roots and preserve its identity, let alone properly represent itself to the West? Muslims in general, I tell the mufti, have lost sight of some of the most basic aspects of their religion, including the Arabic language, which is needed to properly understand it. It's true, I think, even in Arabic-speaking countries, which struggle to present Islam to their Western counterparts. Public morals and manners have deteriorated, sexual harassment is rampant on our streets. "*The enchantment with the English language*," he answers me, "*is because it managed to invade the whole world. Its people have exerted a great deal of effort to simplify and distribute it, reaching and teaching it to the majority of people until it became the number-one language in the world. I do not lean toward the idea of a cultural collapse as much as the fact that this is simply a characteristic of the time we live in.*" As for the deterioration of manners, he puts it down to the fact that the rhythm of life has become faster.

Changes in communication technology, transportation and the population boom all factor here, he says, “so the average person has become more distracted in gaining his daily bread or performing his daily activities. Also,” he adds, “Muslims in most Arab countries suffer from illiteracy, unemployment.” He is unruffled, perfectly serene as he says this. I ask him, with all these problems just in Muslim Arab countries, with Western and Asian Muslims having their own set of problems, how can he believe that the ummah will rise again? Is there even such a thing as a Muslim ummah anymore?

He gives me that impenetrable stare again, the one where you have no idea what he’s thinking. It could be “*What an idiot.*” If I’m lucky, it’s, “*That’s an interesting question.*” Unlike other sheikhs, Gomaa does not stare at the ground while talking to a woman, but maintains direct eye contact to the extent that I was the one to look away from his piercing gaze. “*From the political side,*” he begins, “*it may be hard in the near future for the Muslim ummah to unite. But on the realistic side, other unified entities do exist, such as the European Union.* There are common markets. There are common defense entities. Other international organizations like the Organization of the Islamic Conference. “*Hope is there, because from the intellectual and realistic side, the Muslim ummah is one ummah. It’s so clear in the Hajj, when from 120 countries over 3 million people come to one arena. Their cooperation proves the unity of this ummah. It underscores the intellectual and religious continuity of the ummah.*”

Fatwa Frenzy

If often seems the mufti gets the same questions from interviewer after interviewer, newspaper, online or television. It’s like some form of never-changing crop rotation cycle, but instead of wheat-maize-oats, it’s hijab-interest-apostates. Why does he think people focus on these — not exactly superficial, but certainly “surface” — aspects of Islam? “*The importance placed on these things differs according to who you are,*” he smiles. “*For example, scholars care very much about updating [according to the time we live in] and not about the problem of hijab and banks. This is evidenced in, for example, the very big list [of topics] that the Islamic Fiqh Academy of the Organization of the Islamic Conference based in Jeddah has [to discuss]. They and many others focus on the political, social and intellectual fields.*” So why don’t scholars spend more time discussing these many issues in public? “*Because the media choose some things around which to create a new reality,*” he explains. “*That leads some people to care*

about these issues, not about those that might have more meaning. Other issues do not, therefore, become intriguing to normal life." Islamic scholars discussed thousands and thousands of issues throughout the twentieth century, he tells us. But of the tons of papers and books they churn out, the media only picks up on the handful of opinions handed down on controversial issues. And, of course, on the opinions and fatwas of those on or beyond the margins of respectability. (A fatwa is a religious ruling based on Islamic law and should be issued by a competent, educated scholar. Dar Al-Ifta literally issues hundreds of thousands of them each year.)

"For Al-Ahram [the leading Arabic-language daily] I have written more than 120 articles about 120 topics ranging from coexistence to bridges between civilizations to pluralism in the political system," he says. *"Not one of them has been [properly] discussed by the media."* Indeed, Gomaa went so far last year as to use his Ahram column to caustically rebuke *"our fellow Egyptian journalists"* for being preoccupied *"with their attempts to misconstrue religious questions to [manufacture] controversial issues for the dailies."* The media, he says, only focuses on that which is sensational and sure to cause an outcry. Case in point: the recent media uproar over a fatwa handed down by Sheikh Ezzat Attiya. Yes, that one, the breastfeeding fatwa that somehow declared that a woman can breastfeed her male colleague five times to circumvent the Islamic ban on a man and woman being alone at work.

Although Gomaa himself is no stranger to eccentric fatwas — he has declared hymen-restoration surgery legitimate in cases other than rape and has studied the supposed practice of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) drinking the Prophet's urine — the mufti has said that oddball fatwas such as the one on breastfeeding are a not-unexpected outgrowth of an undisciplined system. Indeed, the system has lost so much credibility that the verb "*beyifty*" has entered Egyptian slang. Literally meaning "*giving a fatwa*," it is now used to refer to someone who is pontificating about a subject about which he actually knows nothing. In the days after the breastfeeding fatwa made headlines in Egypt and around the world, Gomaa suspended Attiya and referred him to Al-Azhar's disciplinary committee. The next week, he called on scholars at a conference in Kuwait to embrace the establishment of an international council to issue uniform, coherent fatwas for the faithful around the globe. He has since tabled another proposal to Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar Mohammed Sayed

Tantawi to create an Egyptian body to monitor the fatwas issued by the “tele-imams” — as Gomaa calls them — who issue opinions online and on satellite television. *“This kind of proposal has come from the ummah itself because this is an age in which freedom of expression has to be respected,”* the mufti recently told Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, the prominent pan-Arab daily. *“There is not one party that is capable of abiding by such control and therefore it has to be approved by everyone and efforts have to be made to create a public opinion and a prevailing culture that embraces the presence of such a tool to control fatwas.”* The work of the body, he explained to them, would be to *“check for violations of Shariah and the opinions of the Sunni and Muslim consensus and for any violation of Shariah sources. If it finds errors, it would try to advise those who made the mistakes to rectify the situation. The question of authority and the judicial power to punish offenders needs to be debated by legislators,”* he says, *“which requires discussion on a larger scale rather than by clerics alone in order to avoid the misunderstanding that these clerics want authority for themselves.”*

Meanwhile, the telegenic mufti says his colleagues in the media need to do more to dampen the flames of controversy. Journalists, he says, must stop *“commenting on the fatwas in ignorance and making them the talk of the world.”* Fatwas, the mufti believes, are serious tools that only the very qualified should be permitted to use, saying in a recent lecture in London that *“Fatwas represent a bridge between the tradition of Islamic jurisprudence and the contemporary world in which we live. They are the link between the past and the present, the absolute and the relative, the theoretical and the practical. For this reason, it takes more than just knowledge of Islamic law to issue a fatwa.”* But inappropriate fatwas do more than harm the image of Islam abroad by, say, talking about breastfeeding one’s grown colleagues. As Gomaa well knows, ill-informed opinions can also stoke the embers of radicalism, playing on cultural and religious differences and the misunderstandings of history to drive extremist ideologies forward. *“When each and every person’s unqualified opinion is considered a fatwa,”* the mufti continued in his lecture, *“we lose a tool that is of the utmost importance for reigning in extremism and preserving the flexibility and balance of Islamic law.”* To help prevent the faithful — in Egypt, at least — from turning to unqualified ‘scholars,’ the mufti has created a website and a Dar Al-Ifta hotline callers can dial free of charge to speak with one of 12 muftis, who together issue more than 1,000 fatwas a day. That’s more than six times the average number issued in a day last century.

A Day in the Life of the Mufti

The Grand Mufti's job is to oversee Dar Al-Ifta, and I confess I had no idea what exactly it entailed. So I ask him what his normal day is like. He seems amused by the question and answers in a drawn out tone usually reserved for talking to children: "*I wake up at fajr, and I pray it. I sit, and I read my wird [litany of daily devotions, usually involving recitation of the Qur'an and supplications arranged in a particular order] until shuruq [sunrise]. Do you know what a wird is or not?*" It's official. He thinks I'm an idiot.

"After the shuruq yesha'sha' keda [Egyptian play on the word shorouq, meaning when the sun has completely risen]" he continues blithely, "I start studying books and reviewing problems of Fiqh. I record the things I want to record or write my articles. I investigate books and maybe take some notes from them. Then I take my medicine and breakfast and go to work."

A packed day even before it began. At Dar Al-Ifta by around 9am, Gomaa then works at his desk until noon. "*The work,*" he explains "*includes meetings and conferences and lectures, answering questions, answering letters that reach the Dar, and so on.*" The day I came, he had been filming for over an hour with Al-Arabiya. When he wrapped our interview, he headed off to a number of meetings, then to another television interview. He went home for a scant few hours before setting off to the Conrad Cairo Hotel for the three-hour-long launch of Misr El-Kheir.

Misr El-Kheir is a new charity organization — independent of Dar Al-Ifta — on whose board of trustees the mufti sits. It collects zakat (the alms amounting to 2.5 percent of their wealth that each Muslim must give annually) from the faithful, who are able to deposit it straight into Misr El-Kheir's bank account. The organization, which hopes to collect LE 5 billion in one year, supports activities in five areas, including health, education, scientific research, arts and sports, and social solidarity. (The account number, the Mufti will later tell us, is "*meya meya*," a play on the fact that the number is 100100, which is the Egyptian saying for something that is very good.) The mufti arrives an hour before he is scheduled to speak, and mingles and listens to others at his table while munching on petit fours. He bounds up the steps when it was his turn to speak and is on his feet at the podium for over an hour extolling the virtues of the new organization. He's an excellent public speaker, a fact that has helped make him loved by

the public, and peppers his talks with anecdotes and jokes. He tells the audience, for example, that the new account registration number is 555 “*to prevent hasad [the evil eye, since many believe the number five will keep away the evil eye].*” “*I’m sorry if I’ve gone on for too long*” he concludes. “*I’m a preacher and a teacher, you see, so I like to talk a lot.*” Next up was a Q & A session. While I was winding down, tired from following him across Cairo today, the mufti is as sharp as he was in our morning interview. Every question gets a detailed answer, nothing is rushed. The event wraps up around 10pm and all the faithful head home.

All, that is, except for Ali Gomaa, who heads over to sound stage at El-Beit Beitak, the hit Channel 2 evening talk show, to offer a few sound bits. He’s mobbed with questions afterward and takes them in one by one before, finally, slipping back into a black Mercedes to head home. Gone are the days when a scholar could pass his time in his home or the mosque, fingering his prayer beads and teaching 10 or 20 students at most. In our globalized world, the mufti needs to be a scholar, a dynamic public speaker, a writer and a TV presenter to be successful. And although his work hours are technically 9 to 5, Ali Gomaa’s are a 24-hour-a-day burden. Gomaa is an extremely memorable person, which helps explain how he has turned what was a position hitherto ignored by most Egyptians into a bully pulpit from which to exhort the faithful to go forth and do better in life and in faith. Our mufti can be a charming, eccentric, blunt, funny, grandfatherly type — and deadly serious when needs be. Nothing ruffles his feathers: He can sidestep questions with alacrity and is cool under attack.

His critics, as much as they dislike him or his fatwas, respect him greatly and can never deny that his opinions are founded on solid research, and that his arguments are properly formulated. During his tenure, Gomaa has transformed Dar Al-Ifta’s public face with a call center and a website available in Arabic, English, French, and German. While publishing 10 books, he has also started training teachers and is in the process of developing an e-learning website so people can be trained in ifta’ (the giving of fatwas) around the world. He’s changed Dar Al-Ifta, but how has Dar Al-Ifta changed him? He smiles, then offers one of his classic jokes, quoting an old Egyptian song: “*I am as I am, and you are the one who changes.*” Okay, fine, but where does he see himself in 10 years? “*If I am alive, then [may] Allah grant us success, and the future is in the hands of Allah.*”

Who is Ali Gomaa?

Ali Gomaa Mohamad Abdel-Wahab, 55, the trilingual Grand Mufti of Dar Al-Ifta, was appointed by President Hosni Mubarak in 2003. The country's most senior interpreter and administrator of Islamic law, he is second only to the Sheikh of Al-Azhar, making him one of the highest-ranking clerics in the Sunni Muslim world. Born in Beni Suef, he is married and has three daughters. "*One lives in America*," he tells me, "*one is with [me] at home, and one lives near [me]*." He has five grandchildren — three boys and two girls — who "just started school today" he tells me with a smile.

Unlike many who aspire to high religious office, Gomaa did not start out studying at the feet of scholars. Instead, he earned a BA in commerce from Ain Shams University in 1973. At Ain Shams, he began to memorize the Qur'an and, eventually, to study hadith and delve deeper into Islamic studies. Although he had not gone through the Al-Azhar high school curriculum, he memorized all of its basic texts during his freshman year when he enrolled at Al-Azhar University in 1976. He earned his BA from Al-Azhar three years later before going on to earn an MA in 1985 and a PhD in Shariah and law in 1988 from the same school. He became a professor of Usul Al-Fiqh (the four canons of Islamic jurisprudence) at the Faculty of Islamic and Arabic Studies, publishing over 25 books during his tenure there. Later, in 1998, he began teaching open classes at Al-Azhar Mosque six days a week, from sunrise until noon, reviving the centuries-old tradition of the Islamic halaqa (circle) in 1998 because, he told an interviewer, "*I want people to continue in the tradition of knowledge, reading the classical texts the way they were written, not the way people want to understand them.*"

At the same time, he was the khatib (orator) at Sultan Hassan Mosque, in the shadow of the Citadel, where he delivered the Friday sermon and followed prayers with a lesson and a Q&A session. He still gives the sermon there on alternate weekends to this very day. In short: Before becoming mufti and, more recently, a media celebrity, Gomaa was well-known by a select few, and his tapes sold in modest numbers, but by no means was his name instantly recognized by the masses. His current status as a household name stands in stark contrast to his predecessor, Ahmed El-Tayyeb, whose name elicits little more than "Who?" from most people.

Prior to his appointment, Gomaa dressed in normal clothes, walked around with a bare head, and spoke colloquial Arabic. Today, he dresses in a perfectly pressed navy kaftan (a man's cotton or silk cloak buttoned down the front, with full sleeves) with a white galabeyya (traditional white male garment) underneath it, and speaks mainly in classical Arabic, albeit in a form that is more easily understood and punctuated with colloquialisms. The image of the traditional scholar is perfected with his red and white Azhari cap, white socks and sensible shoes. The one thing he didn't change about his outward appearance is that which makes him a favorite of the Egyptian public: His demeanor. That, along with his character and engaging personality, is what makes him the "*People's Mufti*."

He is widely traveled and a liberal voice by Azhar standards: open minded and progressive, believing that women have the right to become judges and even heads of state and leaders of nations. He believes in religious cooperation and is a firm advocate of dialogue and coexistence. But perhaps the thing that made him so well known is the fact he is no media recluse. A strong public speaker, he is far from the image of the scholar secluded in a mosque reading the Qur'an with people timidly asking his advice.

Indeed, Gomaa's is a familiar face to those who watch broadcast and satellite television. A frequent guest on talkshows, he also writes a weekly column for Al-Ahram, the nation's largest daily and appears every Tuesday on El-Beit Beitak, state-run Channel 2's hit evening talkshow. Far from focusing on narrow or obscure topics, the mufti revels in tackling the hot-button topics of the day. Gomaa's media vision doesn't stop with the Arab world: Gomaa has invited foreign religious leaders to Al-Azhar and has appeared in leading non-Muslim media outlets such as the Washington Post to promote interfaith dialogue.

A mufti who doesn't know the concerns of the world in which he lives, Gomaa once said, is as a man "*moving along a dark path with no light in his hand*."

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=68

Ali Gomaa: Bridges of Understanding

Source: *The Ahram Weekly*

Credible eminence is the challenge faced by any grand mufti in this day and age, and while one might choose to abide by a fatwa of his -- a fatwa, as he is eager to point out, is but a legal opinion on a specific topic, by no means binding to everyone in the Muslim community -- there is no denying the love and respect Sheikh Ali Gomaa inspires, nor the fact that, however lightly the media have taken some of his fatwas, he embodies hope in a progressive and tolerant future, counterpointing many and varying hardline views.

He comes at the start of millennium, and for those Muslims who respond to him, at least, he is the right man at the right time. Though perfectly orthodox, Sheikh Gomaa is sufficiently aware of perspective and context to answer questions about daily life, politics, economics, women's status, sociology, science, astronomy, sports and art in a breathtakingly modern spirit, demonstrating as much familiarity with the secular as with the religious world. His responses testify to the ability to formulate a vision which, orthodox in its roots and form, is nonetheless modern in outlook and content. A Sufi, globally-oriented, Sheikh Gomaa is a multilingual orator, a professor in the modern sense as well as a religious scholar, a writer, television presenter, a husband and a father. And, controversial as he has proved to be, he is intent on preaching his message wherever he happens to be in the world, regardless of how it rings with government figures or other religious authorities.

Opium of the people it may be for some, or a cosmetic dimension of the human constitution: Sheikh Gomaa believes religion is, contrary to all that, "an innate desire", almost biological, necessary for the well-being of humanity. He stresses that, since the European Enlightenment, secularism has palpably failed to satisfy people's needs, and cites the current global return to religion as evidence. "*Especially in this country,*" he says, referring as much to Christians and Muslims, "*people love religion, a bond all the stronger now that communism has fallen.*" Yet in this information age, with fatwas swirling and the surge of religiosity often taking extreme forms, what may be the guiding principle? Sheikh Gomaa is one possible answer. As this conversation has proved, in far fewer words and far less time than one really wanted -- having found a stream, the thirsty wanderer thinks he must drink it

all! -- when it comes to the problems surrounding Islam, the bottom line is ignorance. Islam is badly understood, or not at all. Debates are seldom constructive, imitation is the norm, intellect is all but non-existent, and the free association of barely digested ideas will often lead to false conclusions accepted as the truth. The sickness should be dealt with "smoothly and systematically", Sheikh Gomaa says, "*mainly by the media, whose power is unequalled, but only within the framework of religious scholarship rather than its current, ignorant interventions*". Call him mawlana or doctor -- he is equally convincing wearing either hat: Sheikh Gomaa is professor of usul al-fiqh (the four canons of Islamic jurisprudence -- Quran, Sunna, qiyas or analogy, and ijmaa or consensus) at the Faculty of Islamic and Arabic Studies, Al-Azhar University, and the khatib (orator) of the Sultan Hassan Mosque as well as grand mufti.

And, his schedule notwithstanding, he is available for personal consultations twice a week at Al-Azhar and Sultan Hassan, where he answers every kind of question. He also appears on three different television programmes and has written over 20 books. Since being appointed grand mufti four years ago, Sheikh Gomaa's discourse has consistently called for reforming the Islamic institution in line with the contemporary world and resorting to the intellect before all else. Though his lawyer father was not against his desire to join Al-Azhar as a boy, Sheikh Gomaa's mother insisted on a secular degree. And so it was after obtaining a BA in commerce from Ain Shams University in 1973 that he completed his BA, MA and PhD in Islamic law at Al-Azhar University (in 1979, 1985 and 1988, respectively). A man with a vision, Sheikh Gomaa believes that, from his current pedestal, he can influence Islamic thinking in the 21st century.

In harmony with the public at large, Sheikh Gomaa is often at odds with religious authorities of various ilks. Even those who appreciate the depth and breadth of his scholarship are sometimes angered by his fatwas, believing them to be unorthodox; extremists, for example, call for a literal interpretation of the texts, up to and including an overthrow of the regime, while the secularly minded would rather have a nutshell Islam for the times, clear of all tradition. Somehow Sheikh Gomaa treads a path between the opposing views: "*I am not going to remould religion ignoring 14 centuries to suit whoever,*" he said recently during an episode of Al-Bait Baitak, a popular talk show. "*I will do my work, issuing the fatwas best suited to the age as I see it, and I will be judged*

later by God." Thanks partly to his excellent media office (headed by Ibrahim Negm, a Harvard graduate who nonetheless abides by the tradition of kissing the sheikh's hand in greeting - which sometimes is misunderstood as a religious act and something that inspired respect in this instance), the 54-year-old Sheikh Gomaa generously offered some of his time at Dar Al-Iftaa, one of the world's most venerable centres of Muslim authority, founded in 1895, where he succeeded Sheikh Ahmed El-Tayeb to become Egypt's 18th grand mufti.

His office, where I had some time to reflect while a group of visitors took their leave, proved remarkably cosmopolitan, what with the variety of faces and costumes -- both Azharite and modern, all speaking Arabic. Though courteous and gentle, Sheikh Gomaa was initially somehow reserved, no doubt a consequence of bad experiences with the media in the past. Of the innumerable issues to do with religion now raging, which should one start with? An outline seemed necessary: at the local level, his fatwas have caused a furore; at the regional level, conflicting multi- fatwas have given way to a kind of unstable religious market place confusing believers; at the international level, Islam is being scrutinised and Muslim immigrants face the challenges of integration into Western society. Acknowledging the global village and the need for a contemporary as much as a traditional perspective, Sheikh Gomaa, focussing on his own role, insists that a fatwa is an intellectual act outside scripture, which makes it both unbinding and, by definition, a functional act.

Sheikh Gomaa's position hasn't stopped him from resuming a social role (he is, for example, the founder of the Egypt Goodness Foundation and a major player in the Food Bank), and this attitude reflects the integrity with which he faces the widest range of issues imaginable through the press, television and even the worldwide web. He evidently feels the need for Dar Al-Iftaa, the traditional stronghold, to compete with various, seldom reliable sources of fatwas, though he believes the media is behind much of the apparent trouble, blowing up issues and circulating misinformation; at a Dar Al-Iftaa conference in Kuwait, Sheikh Gomaa proposed that Islamic institutions put together a unified standard to which all sheikhs who issue fatwas the world over can adhere. This was a week after Sheikh Ezzat Atiya, dean of the Hadith department at Al-Azhar University, issued the notorious breastfeeding fatwa, drawing on the tradition that prohibits sexual relations between a man and a woman who had breastfed him to

suggest that symbolic breastfeeding could be a way round the segregation of males and females -- only to face a disciplinary committee.

According to Sheikh Gomaa speaking recently in London, "*when each and every person's unqualified opinion is considered a fatwa, we have lost a tool that is of the utmost importance to rein in extremism and preserve the flexibility and balance of Islamic law.*" Unqualified authorities must stop issuing fatwas, he repeats now, but even more importantly, the media must stop "*commenting on the fatwas in ignorance and making them the talk of the world*". About this issue he is particularly clear: "*Responsibility and power are two faces of the same coin and I don't have the power to change reality, so change can only come through tolerant communication, advice, scholarship and constructive debate.*" Sheikh Gomaa sits up. "*Such chaos comes of misinterpreting the essence of religion.*" What is needed is a culture capable of accepting religion as a science comparable to medicine, not a field like entertainment.

The difference is that, in the latter category, judgement depends on taste, while the former is objective and systematic: "*you can reject a particular treatment but you can't change medicine as a whole; your judgment may be different from another -- and this is not a question of religion but one of religiosity -- and you might reject religion overall. But you can't have tastes about it, you can't change it to suit your tastes.*" Only scholars can pronounce, and even then they must have two skills besides a deep understanding of the law: knowledge of reality, and the ability to apply the law to it. They can debate among themselves, and a Muslim has every right to take or leave what they offer. A ruling in scripture is eternal and unchanged; a fatwa is a pronouncement on how to apply it; and it must take into account not only time and place but the people to whom it is being applied and the state they are in.

It is public figures giving in to "the superstitious attitude" and talking religion that must be combated. There are clearly prescribed steps for issuing a fatwa, and Sheikh Gomaa has equipped Dar Al-Iftaa with a team of 12 muftis capable of issuing 1,000 fatwas daily. Seeking such guidance is not encouraged in Islam, except where it is necessary due to the development of societies. Sadly, however, "people keep asking the same questions over and over again". Be that as it may, a fatwa should always be understood as a bridge linking past with present, absolute with relative, theoretical with practical: "For this reason it takes more than knowledge of Islamic law to issue a fatwa."

Potentially explosive issues on which he has pronounced include women acting as judges, statutory, yoga, gambling on sports, organ transplants, the unification of the call to prayer, mobile phone reinforcement transmitters on top of minarets and serving alcohol as part of your job in a non-Muslim country.

A furore was recently instigated in the press when Gomaa was quoted by the independent daily Al-Masry Al-Yom, as giving an “opinion” regarding the sanctity of the Prophet Mohamed’s body, saying that such sanctity extended to his “urine”. Gomaa was vehemently attacked by commentators for what was perceived as an inappropriate statement not suited for a religious authority of his stature. Gomaa sticks to his guns, however, asserting that the controversial statement was actually a “misquotation” of a passage in a work that he had authored. He reiterates the view that, within Muslim jurisprudence, all that emanated from the body of the prophets is “sacred and blessed”. His point of view notwithstanding, Gomaa still had his own book pulled out of the market, in a bid to end “all current as well as future controversy”.

Why bring all this up at a time when it could have negative effects on Islam and its image? “My duty is to answer whatever question I am asked. They are all part of a compendium of 2,300,000 questions answered in our 14-century history.” Whether one agrees with him or not, one cannot deny the impact of his statements on public opinion. He concedes that the ongoing dialogue reflects the society that he lives, and its prevalent culture.

Why, then, remain silent when it comes to politics?

His interests, he says, lie in reviving the waqf (foundation) system, overseeing zakat (the legal charity system of Islam), community integration and improving understanding: “There is no problem with a political movement but I think social, economic and intellectual movements should have priority. As a human being, the mufti has a political stance and a vision but for his job he cannot belong to one group or party at the expense of another.” Dar Al-Iftaa is nominally part of the Ministry of Justice but has full autonomy and is not allowed to interfere with the work of the secular courts or government policies. Nor is it affiliated with Al-Azhar except insofar as its employees -- down to Sheikh Gomaa, who is a member of Al-Azhar’s Council of Islamic

Research -- are Al-Azhar graduates. It is a relation of integration, he says, not of conflict; the final word is that of the council, however, which is an international body headed by Al-Azhar. The flexibility of Islam is as much legal as cultural, he insists, the law being both a methodology and a canon of positions adopted by jurists over 14 centuries including no less than 90 schools of legal thought: the 21st century offers "a providential position" from which to benefit from this huge corpus. Claims that the door to ijтиhad (the exertion of effort in coming up with a new ruling) were closed after the fourth century of the Hijra find no resonance with Gomaa.

"There is no door to ijтиhad to open or close - only the recurrent need for it. Fatwas like those concerning the permissibility of women baring their hair or smoking during the fast in Ramadan are unacceptable because they have not been correctly deducted from the Quran and Sunna." But a liberalist he most undoubtedly is, in line with all grand muftis appointed by the presidency and not, as had been the case until the 1980s, by Al-Azhar. With less originality, perhaps, others frequently flouted-conservative- popular sentiment, an accusation from which Gomaa too suffers. But the issue, he says, is political: "*There are those whose mission is to cut off [religious] scholars from the ummah (Muslim community) through blaming the authorities.*"

Of the 120,000 fatwas issued by Sheikh Gomaa, not one, however, was in the interest of the government. "In Imam Mohamed Abdu's reign [1899- 1905], he issued no more than 942 fatwas ; now we issue more than 1,000 f atwas a day. Taking population growth into account, this means 1,800 fatwas to each issued by Imam Abdu. Where, then, is the separation between scholars and the public? If anything, this change is evidence of spiritual need, not ignorance and definitely not separation." But just as important is the business of clearing up the confusion surrounding Islam and Muslims in the West, largely a matter of discussing the possibility of integration with the West and emphasising the multiplicity of (Muslim) civilisation: its humanitarian and cosmopolitan dimensions, its spiritual and material side, its flexible mode of government and its survival under non-theocratic states. The issues at stake include extremism, suicide bombing and the theory and practise of Jihad. At a recent Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme (CIP) conference in Britain, which boasted the presence of then prime minister Tony Blair, included a reception by Gordon Brown (the UKs new PM) and opened with a video conferencing session with Prince

Charles, Sheikh Gomaa was the voice of moderation. "Blair's practical proposal for raising awareness was exactly what I had called for two years before in London," Sheikh Gomaa said on his return to Cairo. "We have to think about establishing a central authoritative body in London too, to gather Muslims, especially Muslims of British origins, and solve their problems." Elsewhere he highlighted the need to separate orthodoxy from extremism: "some people claim that the history of Islam is tainted. From my own long study of the religion and its history, I can attest to the fact that Islam is entirely innocent of ethnic cleansing, inquisitions and forced conversion -- an opinion confirmed by a study undertaken by Richard W Bulliet, a pre-eminent Middle East scholar at New York's Columbia University, who demonstrated that while the body politic of Islam spread quickly, it took hundreds of years for populations to convert. Therefore, in reality the faith was spread through love, intermarriage and family relations, not by the sword. We all need to learn from history and build a world fit for our grandchildren."

Most astounding, however, are Sheikh Gomaa's views on women: "*I believe Islam gives men and women equal social and political rights -- the right to be heads of state and judges included.*" A staunch opponent of any form of extremism, Sheikh Gomaa was saddened to find his name attached to a foreword he never wrote to an Arabic edition of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Here as elsewhere he displays far more humanity than is evident within the space allowed this piece: he switches effortlessly from one role to the next, from tolerant intellectual to unwieldy debater, from psychiatrist to everyday father, with a wonderfully witty sense of humour. His posture and alertness are only two facets of the aura that engulfs you in his presence, which involves a breathtaking intelligence and delightfully easy classical Arabic. "I've had a target and a vision.

I want to expand knowledge of Islam and, as much as I can, to deliver its message and revivify it, for the benefit of those who will arrive in my wake. I want to serve Islam, whether as preacher or mufti, whether as husband or father, in and out of Egypt. The main thing is to work hard, and pray for success." One tradition he revived is that of the Sheikh Amoud, wherein a sheikh sitting with his back to a pillar teaches a group of students -- an open- university approach to the study of religion. His taste in calligraphy has found various expressions, and he boasts of a photographic memory allowing him to recite

upwards of 1,000 lines of traditional poetry at a time. Though he has not forgotten the wrongs that have been committed against him, his principle reaction is to repeat, yet again, that he is someone who issues fatwas -- a craftsman doing his job.

http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=15

<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2007/851/profile.htm>

Articles of faith

Source: The Ahram Weekly

These are difficult and confusing times to be a Muslim. You talk to Muslims from all walks of life and they tell you: the days of glory are long gone, these are times of strife, and at best of challenge. You listen to people in the West talk of Islam and you're scared. What is this religion that makes people want to kill? What is this archaic system of thought that makes people so backward? Just last month the Nobel prize for literature went to the Trinidad-born British novelist V S Naipaul, who argues vehemently -- among other things -- that Islam is just not fit for the modern world.

Indeed, it sometimes seems that Islam has been hijacked by powers from both ends of an imaginary intellectual spectrum and that reduce it to violence (jihad?) and discrimination against women (hijab?). Whether staunchly Orientalist and anti-Muslim or staunchly fanatic and puritan, these two poles offer a confusing and scary (if unbelievably simplistic) picture of a rich cultural and religious tradition that goes back 15 centuries. In the midst of this confusion, compounded by international political developments, there have been shy efforts in the Middle East and in the West to (re)define just what Islam is. Others, in apparently more traditional settings, have gone on doing what their predecessors have been doing for centuries. They teach, they preach, they write, they live their lives and call themselves Muslims. Others call them ulama.

There is -- naturally -- a certain aura about Al-Azhar, and a certain majesty. It was a Thursday morning when we went and were guided quite quickly to "Doctor Ali's lesson." It could have been a scene out of the middle ages. Al-Maqrizi could have written this. Across the spotless white marble we entered the doctor's riwaq (gallery). The lesson was already underway, Sheikh Ali Gomaa sitting with his legs up, knees bent, on a large traditional chair, his back to a wall and his students around him in a semi-circle, a halaqa, the men closer to him, the women discreetly at the back. They came in different colours, the students, in different costumes, from various corners of the globe, extremely young and middle-aged, traditionally-dressed, Westernised, you name it. We took our places amongst the women, at the back -- of course. All around the riwaq are bookcases laden with hard-backed volumes of the canons of jurisprudence.

This was a lesson in economics, out of Al-Suyuti. Ali Gomaa is professor of usul al-fiqh (the four canons of Islamic jurisprudence -- Qur'an, Sunna, qiyas or analogy, and ijma' or consensus) at the Faculty of Islamic and Arabic Studies, Al-Azhar University. He is also the khatib (orator) of the Sultan Hassan Mosque. His is not a name that is often mentioned in the press or on television; he's not one of the "popular media ulama," but he too has his sermons recorded on tape, and the Friday prayers at Sultan Hassan have their regulars.

For the inevitable introduction, one had to move out of the women's circle and encroach on the men's. Despite the flagrant trespass, I was completely ignored for a good while. And then suddenly he turned, impatiently it seemed, and asked what it was I wanted. I was from Al-Ahram Weekly? The Profile? "Sit down here on this chair, my child," he said and turned back to the students, who gathered around him asking him last-minute questions and favours. I preferred the ground, thank you. A middle-aged woman with a little boy pushed her way through. "*I want to ask him to help me get the boy into hospital.*"

Suddenly, the sheikh's mobile phone rang: the Nokia melody. And we were whisked back to the 21st.

And now to business, follow me, my child. Follow him we did, into his rooms off the riwaq, two offices and a sitting room carpeted quite modestly with the mass-produced red carpet now common to most mosques, several cushions thrown around to sit on and an ugly glass table with a mini-fridge on top. Nothing else: quite bare, this room. But there were windows on Al-Azhar street. And there was light. How does one approach a man of God? Certainly with reverence. Remember not to extend your hand to shake his (I was forewarned). Dress modestly. I came prepared with a headscarf, notebook and tape recorder. But he is hardly what one would expect of an 'alim. He does not dress like one; no turban, no quftan; just one of those sporty summery cotton suits, at one time the emblem of the loyal government employee, blue, with a checked shirt underneath. Head bare, silver grey beard fashionably trimmed. Turko- Mongol traces in the face. And he doesn't talk like the religious scholars on television. Except for the occasional "*ya bunayyati,*" he talks in colloquial Arabic -- even with his students. Could he please sit there, to let God's light fall on his face? Randa inquired quite respectfully. "*What is this business of 'God's light? God's light is everywhere. Why don't you just speak directly? You want to take good photographs. Wait until we're done and then we'll go into*

my office and you can get better photos there. I've done a little photography myself, you see. You won't like any of those photographs. What you will like is the one you will take in the office." Smile.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa is quite well-known in scholarly circles. He has authored more than 20 books. But they're too difficult and specialised for the lay reader, he tells me dismissively. He is the general editor of the Encyclopaedia of Hadith launched just last month as part of the Sunna Project of the Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation, a mega project aimed at documenting and publishing all works related to Muslim Sunna. Yet unlike many ulama, Ali Gomaa did not enter the religious establishment in boyhood. He studied at the Faculty of Commerce, obtaining his BA from Ain Shams University in 1973. He then enrolled at the University of Al-Azhar, obtaining a BA in 1979, an MA in 1985 and a PhD in Shari'a and law in 1988. So why the change of course? What urges a man in this day and age to become an 'alim? Was it a family tradition?

"No, my father was actually a lawyer. But I was very influenced by him. I learnt a lot from him. I used to watch him analyse cases and prepare his briefs. I used to watch him stand up for what is right, unafraid of the powers that be. He used to address police officers and judges quite confidently. They were different times. He was also an avid reader, and our library at home was well-stocked. I've learnt to love reading from him. I read everything. My own library takes up three flats, I have more than 30,000 volumes in it." But did he receive a particular calling? Why did he change paths? Which of his roles does he prefer: teacher, preacher or scholar? He quite cleverly avoids that. "*It is not only a matter of choice. It is God who guides you, God who decides. The important thing is always to work hard and do your best at whatever you do, and pray to God to help you succeed.*" The seminal Encyclopaedia of Hadith is his latest scholarly achievement. An ongoing project, it so far includes the seven major collections of hadith (the sayings of the Prophet Mohamed), and is also available on CD-Rom. This modern technology makes cross-references and links between hadiths infinitely easier. The documentation of hadith, and indeed hadith scholarship itself, is one of the achievements of classical Islam. But why an Encyclopaedia of Hadith now? Are modern ulama attempting to reinvent the wheel? Hasn't all this been done before? "We lost it," Gomaa states emphatically. "*We lost the methodology, and we are in dire need of it in Muslim thought now. We are not trying to rejuvenate a history that is*

archaic; we are trying to rejuvenate a paradigm. This paradigm consists of a holistic vision of the universe that includes humanity and animal kind. A Muslim deals with reality, he deals with this door you see here, realising it too worships God; he deals with natural resources respectfully while other cultures are only beginning to think of protecting the environment. He deals with animals respectfully as well, so that a woman who locked up a cat will go to hell because she dealt with the universe violently, while a prostitute who saved a dog from thirst will go to paradise. What beauty! This is the foundation of a whole man, a man who has a certain understanding of the universe."

All through our encounter the sheikh fingered his long, striking prayer beads. They stand out, they are not subdued or traditional beads. Well, he concedes almost shyly, they're modelled after Sheikh Abdel-Qader Al-Jilani's, which he saw in Brunei. They are made of boxwood, which he bought in Saudi Arabia and had made into beads according to this elaborate design, here in Cairo. It is a very tough kind of wood, he explains, used in making handmills. His beads have multiple counters, so that he can actually count to a hundred million prayers on them! Sometimes it takes him a week to finish a round, sometimes less.

But Muslims are now often perceived as violent people, their views archaic and out of this world. So who is this generic Muslim he is after, really? And how is he to deal with the modern world? "Ever since the time of the Prophet they have been fighting us. This is nothing new, and the clash is not new... I mean the West, the Moscow-Washington axis, has been fighting the Tangier-Jakarta axis ever since the Prophet was sent and is still doing so today. We, on this axis of Tangier-Jakarta/Ghana-Fergana, now referred to as the South, mind our own business; but the other axis, the North, has been fighting us across ages.

"When we entered the countries [during the Arab Muslim conquests of the Middle East in the seventh century], ya bunayyati, we didn't force anyone into anything... We intermarried, and marriage means making a family and complete assimilation. Marriage is not about conflict but about affection, serenity and mercy. We didn't kill the native populations as they did in Australia and America, nor did we set up inquisition courts as they did in Spain, nor did we force anyone to convert to our religion.

"They, on the other hand (and we play dumb and ask 'who's they?'), they stole our children, enslaved them and humiliated them and wouldn't apologise in Durban. They set up inquisition courts and forced Muslims to abandon their religion and tortured them to death in Spain and expelled them. Look at racial discrimination: until today, Anglo-Saxons are the ones controlling those established democracies. Not one black [political leader] has risen, nor will one; no woman has ruled America, nor will one. Something basic is crying out here, saying: these people are good, and these people are evil.

"See, the Muslim is he whose sources of knowledge are both revelation and existence. There is God's visible book, this universe we live in; and God's written book, the mushaf: a major book and a minor book and both are from God. And a Muslim is ordered to read two readings: 'Read; In the name of thy Lord who createth, Createth man from a clot. Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous, Who teacheth by the pen, Teacheth man that which he knew not' (The Clot, 96:1-5) -- a reading in the visible book and a reading in the written book.

"You see, a non-Muslim reads only one reading, in God's visible book only, the universe. He does not see a God behind this universe, and when a God is recognised He is seen as detached from this world and man does what he wants: laissez faire, laissez passer. I say no: Laissez faire laissez passer is theirs, not ours. As a Muslim I say listen to the Shari'a, see what God is ordering you to do, see what is good for this universe and do it." A Muslim's way out of the principal historical predicament passes through rejuvenation of the Muslim paradigm, Gomaa explains. That will only happen through a return to both books of Islam, the visible and the written. The real predicament is that Muslims today are the products of a cultural attack "that has kept us away from the book and from understanding it. Anyone who reads it and understands it will find the first words to be: 'In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate' -- not in the name of God the Merciful the Vengeful, by the way, or in the name of God the Vengeful the Almighty. God is Merciful and Compassionate, as well as Vengeful and Almighty, but God chose two of his names of beauty, rather than two of his names of power, to begin the Qur'an. It is as if God is telling us stay beautiful, keeping power and vengeance for Himself. And even this is out of His mercy; to teach people lessons, so as not to do evil or harm others."

There was quite a crowd at Sultan Hassan for last Friday's prayers, the first of Ramadan. Many came in families, babies and all. There was a noisy air of celebration, especially as the children went on with their games around the open-air ablutions fountain in the middle of the mosque, unmindful of sermon and prayers, the mosque almost an extension of home. Afterwards people gathered to buy recorded tapes of previous sermons. *"Last week's khutba was very good, you must get it,"* a kind gentleman advised. *"Has Sheikh Ali shaved his beard this week?"* a young boy asked his father.

At the mosque he dresses in the traditional garb. Last Friday's khutba outlined a programme for Ramadan: how a Muslim should spend this holy month. This is a month of prayer, and of charity. The market is stagnant, the sheikh reminded the believers; you need to spend money to enliven it, so spend money on charity. And it is a month of maintaining family contacts, and of mercy; have mercy on each other. It is Muslims who do evil unto themselves and each other, he admonished -- not "others." Particularly pertinent words in light of the ongoing turmoil.

The khutba naturally ended in prayers, the believers chanting after the sheikh from the four iwans of Sultan Hassan, crying "*Aamin,*" their voices moving from one side of the building to the other like the waves of a calm sea. *"God grant victory to the mujahidin everywhere... God grant victory to Muslims everywhere... God, we seek your protection from their evil... God, You who are the most Merciful, have mercy on us... God, make our hearts steadfast in faith... God, do not let our calamity be in our religion, do not let this life be our sole concern or all we own... God, You who are the most Merciful,, have mercy on us, You who are the Saviour save us. God, You who are the most Merciful, answer our prayers."* Words that have been repeated for centuries, and yet still have poignant relevance today.

"A Muslim today is the product of a [Westernised] education that comes from England and the US," he laments. *"Such an education doesn't teach us that the whole universe worships God; it doesn't teach us the hadith that if a Muslim has a budding plant in his hands when the day of judgement comes, let him plant it first. Where did this beauty go? After you teach [a young Muslim] nonsense -- that there is nothing beyond this world, nothing except conflict, and that man is by nature violent, that there is conflict between civilisations, conflict between man and the gods as in Greek mythology, and you deprive him of 'the Merciful, the Compassionate' -- after this sort of*

indoctrination, a boy is lost between ideas he just doesn't understand, he approaches the books haphazardly and finds that God says 'faqtulu al-mushrikin haythu wagadtumuhum (slay the idolaters wherever ye find them)' (Al-Tawba 9:5) But who is the mushrik, the polytheist? He really doesn't know. Anybody could be a mushrik and so he shoots just anybody."

Muslims today are confused, he insists, because they are brought up according to contradicting doctrines and philosophies. When Muslims were raised according to the truths of Islam, they were civilised people, they were productive. "Now Muslims are lost between two worlds and confused, not knowing what to belong to. There is no consistency between their faith and the governing systems and regimes they live under: educationally, legally, socially, and even politically. The public order Muslims live within is all taken from non-Muslim sources. There is a contradiction here. We need to restore a Muslim public order. This abnormal situation we are in, in terms of terrorism and violence, is something foreign to Muslims and it is the result of this lack of consistency. We need to understand and reinstate the Muslim paradigm and it is for this that we edit books like the Encyclopaedia. It is the duty of each Muslim, wherever he belongs, to work towards living a life consistent with Islam. But unfortunately the powers that be everywhere are afraid of Islam. Others do not trust this paradigm; they think it is too idealistic."

So obviously an individual Muslim needs a helping hand to extricate himself from this modern predicament. He needs someone to guide him, to show him the way to approach God and His books. But who? "Myself," the sheikh says instinctively, reassuringly (himself being the enlightened man of God), but also, perhaps, too confidently. In addition to his traditional scholarly training, you can tell that his interests are wide. He reads a lot in philosophy, economics and literature. He's quite interested in carpets, he appreciates a good carpet, and semi-precious stones. He's also quite interested in Arabic calligraphy. His handwriting is respectable, yes, but not amazing -- or so he tells me. But he is interested in calligraphy as an art and in its philosophical aspects. Arabic calligraphy is so beautiful, he explains. The most beautiful Arabic script is that used in King Fouad's 1921 mushaf, the writing of the late Sheikh Mohamed Khalaf El- Husseini. And it is this script that was developed into a digitalised typeface for the Encyclopaedia. It is very important that Islamic books be well-produced and attractive. He appreciates beauty, God's work, around him.

And he's travelled widely, from Japan to the United States. Travel is quite important. Contact with people from various cultural backgrounds and trying to explain and spread the message of Islam: this was an important part of Sheikh Ali Gomaa's career. *"It changes one's outlook. You see different peoples living differently. One learns a lot in trying to reformulate one's message of Islam to reach different audiences. There are different levels of discourse. I had to deal with African tribes, for example. And their women were half-naked. These are their customs and way of life. You can't just go in there and attack these customs. You learn to reformulate your message so as to make people love God."* He also travels frequently to the United States, where one of his daughters lives with her family. The son-in-law is an American, but quite a practicing Muslim, quite a nice chap, we are told. Will things be more difficult for Muslims in America now? "No, no, they can't. They can't undermine the very fundamentals of freedom and equality on which the US is built."

It is perhaps telling that Sheikh Ali Gomaa's curriculum vitae starts with the familiar information name, address, certificates, positions, publications and so on. And then the final section lists his ijazas, like any traditional 'alim. Four ulama have particularly influenced his learning and education: his professor of hadith, Abdallah El-Saddiq El- Ghumari, his professor of usul al-fiqh; Mohamed Abul-Nur Zuhair, his professor of Shafi'i jurisprudence; Gad El-Rabb Ramadan and Sheikh El- Husseini Youssef El-Sheikh.

He himself, like many a contemporary Muslim, is also a product of more than one world. But unlike many others, he seems to have navigated and negotiated a way out of the modern predicament, to be living a modern life consistent with the teachings of Islam. "God doesn't change what is within people until they change what is within themselves. We must each change ourselves. Start with yourself. Start today. Do not confuse yourself, start living your life according to the tenets of Islam," he advises earnestly.

But do we not already?

God knows best...

http://www.ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=142

<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2001/561/profile.htm>

Sheikh Ali Gomaa is the Grand Mufti of Egypt issuing environmental fatwas.

Source: Green Prophet

Sheikh Ali Gomaa is the Grand Mufti of Egypt since September 2003 and one of the highest ranking and respected religious authorities throughout the Sunni world. He holds the second highest religious position in Egypt, after that of Sheikh al-Azhar. As the Grand Mufti, he oversees the premier institution throughout the Muslim world for religious legal direction, Dar al-Iftaa. It turns out his educational approach is also very “green”. Sheikh Ali Gomaa (Ali Gomaa Muhammad Abdel Wahhab) was born on March 3, 1952 in Bani Suwaif in Upper Egypt. After graduating from college, Sheikh Ali Gomaa enrolled in al-Azhar University. In 1988, he obtained a PhD from the al-Azhar University’s Department of Shari’ah and Law.

During the 1990s, Sheikh Ali Gomaa served as a Professor of Juristic Methodologies in the al-Azhar University. In addition, as from the mid-1990s, he reestablished the tradition of giving informal lessons in the al-Azhar Mosque. In these lessons, Sheikh Ali Gomaa succeeded to convert Muslims who used to hold extremist views into Muslims who hold a more moderate Islamic approach. In 1998, Sheikh Ali began delivering the Friday sermon at Cairo’s Sultan Hasan Mosque.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa has taken a very clear stance against extremist interpretations of Islam and has become one of the most explicitly anti-extremist clerics in mainstream Sunni Islam. According to him, the use of violence to spread Islam is prohibited and the problem of the radical Muslims is that they have not been educated in genuine centers of Islamic learning. As from the 1990s, he used to go to the prisons and work with radical Muslim prisoners, who denounced violence and embraced the Nonviolence Initiative. In addition, Sheikh Ali Gomaa is in favor of dialogue and understanding with other religions. He is one of the signatories of A Common Word between Us and You, an open letter dated October 13, 2007, which was written by Islamic scholars to Christian leaders, calling for peace and understanding between the followers of both religions. Moreover, Sheikh Ali Gomaa is a signatory of the Amman Message, which gives a broad foundation for defining Muslim orthodoxy, states that nobody has the right to excommunicate a Muslim, and restricts the issuing of fatwas.

(religious rulings) to those with the scholarly qualifications to do so. Furthermore, he has publicly asserted that the famous anti-Semitic book, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, is a forgery. Sheikh Ali Gomaa also issued some controversial fatwas, whose aim is to strive to show the continued relevance of Islam for people living in the 21st century, such as: the permission to sell pork and alcohol in the West; the equal political rights enjoyed by men and women in Islam, including the right to become president of a modern state; and the prohibition of female circumcision.

As part of his progressive and modern thinking and his wish to show the continued relevance of Islam for people living in the 21st century, Sheikh Ali Gomaa made Dar al-Iftaa a modern institution with a fatwa council, systems of checks and balances, a website and a call center, through which people may ask for fatwas even if they cannot come in person to the institution. Sheikh Ali Gomaa's progressive and modern thinking is also reflected in his statements and fatwas concerning the environment. In this article, I would like to focus on Sheikh Ali Gomaa's environmental ideology and activity.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa's Green Ideology

The question of how to utilize religious teachings to solve current environment-related problems has become a priority in Sheikh Ali Gomaa's agenda. He believes that the religious traditions can offer us moral ways and principles for dealing with current environmental issues. In his speech in front of the Parliament of World Religions in Melbourne on December 10, 2009, which was titled "*the Role of Religion in Preserving the Environment*", Sheikh Ali Gomaa said that despite the fact that "*in our day we are struggling with a number of issues related to the environment such as climate change, the pollution of the air, oceans, seas, and waterways, and the challenges of feeding a growing global population*" and despite the fact that "*many of these issues are relatively new so that our forebears did not address them explicitly, our religious traditions do offer us worldviews and principles that aid us in finding solutions to our contemporary problems*".

In order to stress this point, Sheikh Ali Gomaa used to cite in his speeches dealing with environmental issues one Qur'anic phrase and one hadith: "*Do not sow corruption in the earth after it has been set in order: this is better for you, if you are believers*" [7:85]; and the Prophet

Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, “*Those who plant a tree and patiently tend to it until it bears fruit will have the reward of giving charity for everything that it produces*”.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa has been outspoken on environmental sustainability. On November 2, 2009, on his speech at the Alliance of Religions and Conservation conference at Windsor Castle, Sheikh Ali Gomaa said that “*it is a religious duty to safeguard our environment and advocate the importance of preserving it*.” Pollution and global warming pose an even greater threat than war and the fight to preserve the environment could be the most positive way of bringing humanity together.

“Environment-related issues ought to be a significant component of educational curricula. It is the duty of all religious scholars to acquaint themselves with the environmental crisis we are facing.” According to Sheikh Ali Gomaa, in order to reach environmental sustainability, Muslims should understand that their role from an Islamic point of view is to be God’s vicegerents or deputies on earth. As such, they are responsible to care for and maintain the world while benefiting from what the world has to offer. However, Muslims shouldn’t over-exploit, use, and abuse the world and its resources for their own purposes since, as Sheikh Ali Gomaa said, “*it is a shared right that God has established for all living beings and we do not have the authority to deprive even animals of their rights*”. In another speech, Sheikh Ali Gomaa elaborated more on this point and said that “*according to the Islamic paradigm, human beings are the vice regents of God on earth and will be judged in the hereafter for their actions and held accountable for the way they handled the environment*.”

Humankind is not free to consume or pollute carelessly. Preserving nature and preventing corruption in earth is one of the core responsibilities of all believers”. In fact, Sheikh Ali Gomaa said that if the Muslims take good care of the environment, they will be rewarded with goodness, but if they abuse it and leave it to ruin, they will meet a frightful end as stated in the Qur'an: “*those who break their covenant with God after it has been confirmed, who sever the bonds that God has commanded to be joined, who spread corruption on the earth – those are the losers. [2:27].*” Thus, according to Sheikh Ali Gomaa, “*one of the key characteristics of humankind’s role as deputies in the world is balance. We must find a balance between benefiting from the blessings that the world has to offer us,*

and preserving the order that God has established. We must find a balance between securing our own needs while not depriving others of theirs, whether those others reside in different parts of the world, such as less powerful nations, or in different times, such as our children and grandchildren.

“The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: All of creation are God’s dependents, and the most beloved of God’s servants to Him are those that are the most beneficial to His dependents. If we take seriously our role as God’s deputies on earth, not just by benefiting from the environment, but by preserving it and ensuring that other communities and generations will have the same possibilities to drink clean water, breath fresh air, and live in a world that is in harmony with itself and with ourselves, we may hope to be among those who are beloved to God due to their care for His creation.” In fulfilling their role, Muslims have to collaborate with followers of other religions, because, basically, all humanity shares the responsibility to preserve the world. In his speech at the Alliance of Religions and Conservation conference at Windsor Castle on November 2, 2009, Sheikh Ali Gomaa stressed this point by saying that *“we envision a world that is environmentally safe for our children and the next generations where all nations of all religions live in harmony with nature and enjoy justice and fair share of God’s bounties”*.

From Ideology to Practice

Putting theory into practice, Dar al-Iftaa will be the first establishment in Egypt to be declared carbon-free by the end of 2011.[14] Sheikh Ali Gomaa mentioned this already in his speech at the Alliance of Religions and Conservation conference at Windsor Castle on November 2, 2009, where he said that *“I am also very pleased to share with you that Egypt’s Dar Al Iftaa, over which I preside, has started taking practical steps to go carbon neutral in 2010.”* Furthermore, Dar al-Iftaa organized and participated in international forums and conferences which deal with environmental issues, such as the Alexandria Conference on the Sacredness of Water to the Religions, which brought together Muslims and Christians.

Environmental fatwas

Besides, Dar al-Iftaa and Sheikh Ali Gomaa issue environmental fatwas. For example, in 2007, Sheikh Ali Gomaa issued a fatwa in

which he prohibited the farmers from the burning of rice and cotton waste after the harvest. The farmers in the Governorates of Sharqiyyah, Gharbiyyah, Qaliubiyyah, Kafr al-Sheikh, Buhayrah, and Daqahliyyah –the six Governorates with the highest level of rice harvesting in Egypt – have been traditionally used to burn their rice and cotton waste in the fall of every year.

The smoke which comes out of this burning together with the vehicle exhaust fumes and industrial pollution add to Cairo's already heavy pollution and as from 1999 result in a dark layer of smog over Cairo which has been known as the “black cloud”, especially in the months of October and November. This smog has affected children the most. They tend to suffer from difficulty in breathing, lung diseases, asthma or eye infections. In order to fight air pollution over Cairo, Dar al-Iftaa issued a fatwa in which it prohibits the farmers to burn rice and cotton waste. The reason is that the burning of rice waste is considered by Sheikh Ali Gomaa as one of the acts that causes harm to the environment and, therefore, is prohibited in Islam.

As a justification for this ban, the fatwa cited Prophet Muhammad, who said that *“there should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm.”* The fatwa condemns people involved in the practice and regards them as *“causing destruction... without any justification and this is a major sin which the Qur'an forbids.”* This fatwa concerns also those who wish to burn this waste to exterminate germs or insects in the land, because there are other methods that are less harmful. Dar al-Iftaa also requested government authorities to provide environmentally friendly alternatives to farmers to get rid of rice waste.

As a result of this fatwa, the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs launched in November 2008 an awareness campaign targeting the farmers in the Governorates of Sharqiyyah, Gharbiyyah, Qaliubiyyah, Kafr al-Sheikh, Buhayrah, and Daqahliyyah using SMS and a hotline. Text messages saying that the burning of rice waste is bad for the environment were circulated among the farmers. The Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs also held a number of workshops teaching farmers how to recycle rice waste and safe methods of disposal. It also promoted other usage of rice waste such as animal feed, organic fertilizer and greatly supporting and promoting the industries which rely on the rice waste as a primary source of energy, such as paper production. Sheikh Ali Gomaa's environmental agenda has not

been limited to Egypt alone. He took an active part in Muslim gatherings as well as in multi-religious gatherings, such as the Parliament of World Religions which convened in Melbourne on December 10, 2009 or the Alliance of Religions and Conservation conference which was held at Windsor Castle on November 2, 2009 and gave speeches dealing with the need to preserve the environment. In these gatherings and conferences he has not spoken only on behalf of himself and his green ideology but has also represented all the Sunni Muslims. For example, in his speech at the Alliance of Religions and Conservation conference at Windsor Castle on November 2, 2009, Sheikh Ali Gomaa said on behalf of all Muslims that “we envision a world that is environmentally safe for our children and the next generations where all nations of all religions live in harmony with nature and enjoy justice and fair share of God’s bounties. We are committed to contribute to the ongoing global efforts dealing with climate change based on the Muslim Seven Year action plan that reflects Islamic principles and values.

Muslim Association for Climate Change Action (MACCA) has been founded to be responsible for implementing the plan. The response to this action plan that we launched in Istanbul has been remarkable in a lot of ways and practical steps to execute the plan are underway. Major Islamic cities are to declare the Green status soon, such as Sala in Morocco and al-Madinah in Saudi Arabia.” Only at the very end of his speech, Sheikh Ali Gomaa spoke on behalf of himself and said: *“I am also very pleased to share with you that Egypt’s Dar Al Iftaa, over which I preside, has started taking practical steps to go carbon neutral in 2010.”* Together with other Sunni and Shi’ite religious scholars, Sheikh Ali Gomaa supported the Muslim Seven Year Action Plan on Climate Change 2010 – 2017, which was declared in Istanbul following an unprecedented gathering of some 200 key Muslim leaders, scholars, civil society members and government ministries from throughout the Muslim world which was convened on July 6-7, 2009.

This action plan proposes establishing institutional enabling framework; developing overall capacity to deal with climate change and environmental conservation; developing and enhancing communication, outreach, and partnerships; activating and reviving implementation of previous initiatives, plans, and declarations; investigating every level of Muslim activity from daily life to annual pilgrimages, from holy cities to the future training of imams; developing the major

Muslim cities as green city models for other Islamic urban areas; developing an Islamic label for environmentally friendly goods and services; and creating a best practice environmental guide for Islamic businesses". Sheikh Ali Gomaa also wrote a book titled "*The Environment and Its Protection from an Islamic Point of View*," in which he put into paper his green ideology.

Green Conclusions

Sheikh Ali Gomaa has positioned himself at the forefront of the Muslim effort to tackle climate change, which he regards as the most threatening and important challenge facing humanity in the 21st century. He took practical steps so that Dar Al Iftaa, the premier Sunni institution, will be carbon neutral in 2011. He issued a fatwa prohibiting a common custom of Egyptian farmers for the sake of not causing harm to people and the environment. He gave environmental speeches in front of multi-religious gatherings, in which he has spoken in the name of all Muslims. All this makes Sheikh Ali Gomaa a central and leading figure in the Muslim effort to tackle climate change.

There is no doubt that Sheikh Ali Gomaa's thorough Islamic education and knowledge helped him use Islamic texts in order to deal with current environmental problems. But, what has made him better suited to represent the Sunnites and, sometimes, all Muslims in multi-religious gatherings talking about the environment from an Islamic point of view has been his belief in dialogue, understanding and cooperation with followers of other religions. From this point of view, Sheikh Ali Gomaa has not been only a Muslim environmental influential leader but also a worldwide influential religious environmental leader, who — through his example, speeches, and ideology — has inspired many other religious scholars, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, to use religious traditions in order to preserve the environment.

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http://ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=143

<http://www.greenprophet.com/2011/11/sheikh-ali-gomaa-green-muft/>

The Show-Me Sheikh

Source: The Atlantic

On the night of December 30, 2004, the streets of downtown Cairo were unusually crowded. Government police officers, conspicuous in white gaiters, stood at attention outside a mosque, diverting traffic into a single congested lane. The police were on hand not to keep people out but to hem the mosque's occupants in. The speaker that evening was Mohammad Hassen, one of Cairo's most inflammatory sheikhs. President Hosni Mubarak's administration, anxious to allay fears of growing extremism after the October bombings in Sinai, was not taking any chances. Hassen and his followers had been known to advocate violence against Israel in the past.

That evening, however, the mood of the hard-line Islamic community was defensive, not aggressive. Earlier that day, in an appearance on Egyptian national television, Ali Gomaa, the grand mufti of Egypt and one of the highest-ranking clerics in the Sunni Muslim world, had denounced what the West refers to as fundamentalism. Although many Muslim leaders have stepped forward to condemn terrorist violence in recent years, no one before had even implicitly attacked the philosophy, often known as Wahhabism, that is thought to give rise to it—in no small part because Wahhabism is the official doctrine of Saudi Arabia, which controls the holy city of Mecca. But Gomaa did so, and went further: he referred to the extremists as khawerig, or “outsiders”—persons who fail to follow true Islamic law. Historically the term has been attached to the early Islamic dissidents who murdered Imam Ali, the son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad.

In Arab Islamic society it is traditionally taboo to criticize the lifestyle or personal philosophy of any practicing Muslim. Never before had such a respected Islamic scholar and sheikh—much less the religious leader of the most populous Arab nation—laid bare the division between practicing fundamentalists and the rest of the Muslim umma, or religious community. In a region where extremist sheikhs have all but silenced their moderate rivals, this was a dangerous stance to take. For Gomaa, however, it was not an unprecedented one. Since his appointment by Mubarak, in the fall of 2004, the mufti, who is the highest religious authority among the Egyptian sheikhs, has become the most explicitly anti-extremist cleric in mainstream Sunni Islam. In his sermons he frequently refers to “sheikh lock,”

a twist on a colloquialism for a narrow-minded or ignorant person. The insult is clearly aimed at Cairo's radical clerics. Sheikh lock, Gomaa says, represents an imagined Islamic past, not an attainable Islamic future. Among other things, it denies something written in the Koran and repeated in the words of the Prophet: that women are the spiritual equals of men. "Al Jeeli, one of the great thinkers of Islam, learned the Hadith [sayings of the prophet Muhammad] from fifty female sheikhs," Gomaa said in his December television interview. "Fifty female sheikhs! And yet there are those who deny that women have equal spiritual status in Islam. This is a disgrace."

Gomaa typically chooses to address his community face-to-face—in his office at Dar el-Iftah, the Egyptian clerical organization responsible for passing official religious rulings, or at Masgid Sultan Hassan, the medieval Cairene mosque where he delivers a sermon nearly every Friday. He also gives lectures and holds question-and-answer sessions at al-Azhar Mosque, adjacent to the University of al-Azhar, the oldest continuously operating religious school in the world. In Egypt governmental intolerance has forced extremists to confine their activities to the mosques, and it is from within the mosques that Gomaa has taken on radical Islam. On a summer evening in 2004 a man in the crowd at one of the mufti's Q&A sessions posed a difficult question. His wife had asked for khola, the kind of divorce accorded to women under Egyptian law. The man didn't want the divorce—thus his problem.

"*What did you do?*" the mufti asked immediately. There was a ripple of laughter. The man looked confused. Could he compel his wife to stay? What action should he take? "*Set her free,*" the mufti said. "*You have neglected some part of your duty, and she doesn't want you anymore. That's it.*"

Understandably, the man was stunned. For most inhabitants of the Arab world the prevailing cultural attitude toward women—fed and encouraged by Wahhabi doctrine, which is based on Bedouin social norms rather than Islamic jurisprudence—often trumps the rights accorded to women by Islam. Most sheikhs, out of either ignorance or a desire to preserve the status quo, support common assumptions regarding a woman's duty to stay with her husband, to cook and clean, and to raise children. But not Gomaa: a frequent command of his is "*Show me.*" Show me where it says in the Koran or the Sunna

(prophetic tradition) that a woman is obligated to cook, or that she can't ask for a divorce. Those listening are often left speechless, because no such support exists within canonical Islamic texts. The mufti is also adamant about the role of the fatwa, or extrajudicial religious edict, in modern Islam. In the West the word conjures up Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini and his fatwa calling for the assassination of Salman Rushdie in the 1980s; it also brings to mind a more recent case in Nigeria, in which a pregnant woman, accused of adultery after being raped, was condemned to death by stoning. To Gomaa, both represent the flagrant misuse of a long-standing tool of Islamic justice.

"Fatwa should follow certain criteria taken from the Koran and Sunna," Gomaa told me in his office at Dar el-Iftah. "*No one should be made to pay for someone else's misdeeds, because the theory of inherited sin is not present in Islam. There is an emphasis on individual responsibility. Another criterion is that a person should not harm himself or others. Also, actions should be judged by their intentions and goals, so the intention of the action in question must be good, and must be for God.*" He paused, and added in a graver tone, "In addition, suspicion is not a substitute for certainty. This is one of the foundations of straight thinking. " This pronouncement alluded to a weighty issue: Islamic law demands that in order for someone to be convicted of adultery, four witnesses must be able to prove that they saw the accused in the act. This requirement is meant to prevent the authorities from invading a Muslim's private life without irrefutable proof of wrongdoing. However, in modern Islamic courts—many of which are presided over by sheikhs who have no working knowledge of classical Arabic, and thus only the most superficial understanding of Islamic law—this stipulation is often ignored.

Unlike many Muslim clerics, Gomaa had a secular early education. He was born in 1952, and his father was a lawyer in Cairo. Gomaa's first career interests were finance and business. "*I was very influenced by my father,*" he said in a 2001 interview with Al-Ahram Weekly, a Cairo-based English-language newspaper. "*I used to watch him stand up for what is right, unafraid of the powers that be. He used to address police officers and judges quite confidently. Those were different times.*" Encouraged by his parents, Gomaa studied commerce at Ain Shams University, graduating with a bachelor's degree in 1973. After two years in the commercial world, however, he decided to pursue his passion for religious scholarship. He entered al-Azhar University as a freshman,

and earned a B.A. in Islamic studies in 1979, followed by a master's and a Ph.D. in Islamic jurisprudence. In 1988 Gomaa began work as an instructor at al-Azhar. Over the next ten years his popularity in the religious community grew steadily. His sermons, though not available on cassette tape as readily as those of his radical contemporaries, were nonetheless highly sought after, and his classes were always full.

When he became the khatib, or orator, of Masjid Sultan Hassan, a mosque long favored by devout Cairenes, Gomaa began to attract a following of another kind. His rational, contemporary religious views, coupled with his background in commerce, made him appealing to a segment of Egyptian society that was fast becoming a thorn in the side of both the post-Nasserite government and the rising Islamic extremists: the religious middle class. Entrepreneurs, schoolteachers, bankers, engineers, Gomaa's new followers were socially conservative but financially and politically progressive.

They favored extended privatization and transparent governance. Most had been educated in secular institutions, but—owing to the Islamic revival that swept the Middle East in the 1980s and 1990s—many also had a working knowledge of the texts that play a central role in Islamic law: the Koran, the Sunna, and the Hadith. These people saw the growing Wahhabi movement as irrational and an impediment to material progress. "*What Dr. Gomaa was attempting was unique and very important,*" says Hamdi Sabri, one of the mufti's early followers. When he first met Gomaa, in the late 1980s, Sabri was a struggling young businessman, eager to take advantage of his government's move away from socialism. Frustrated by the anti-progressive stance of the fundamentalist movement, Sabri turned to Gomaa for religious guidance. "He was struggling to present Islam in its unaltered form: simply, as the love of God."

Gomaa was free of the Westernization that characterized the liberal sheikhs who were often targets of extremist vitriol. One such sheikh, the leader of a popular Sufi sect, was denounced as decadent and corrupt when he failed to reprimand his followers for drinking liquor and wearing revealing clothes. Gomaa's ideas were countercultural, but his lifestyle was orthodox: he refrained from physical contact with women outside his family, encouraged abstinence before marriage for both sexes, and could often be seen walking with his prayer beads in hand, counting them methodically. Wahhabi extremists had no choice

but to keep quiet; any public criticism of Gomaa would have jeopardized their credibility on the Egyptian street. Government viziers, however, viewed him as a potential ally. Since 1982, when the Mubarak administration appointed its first grand mufti, it has habitually named liberal sheikhs in an effort to reduce the influence of fundamentalist sheikhs. Often the left-leaning edicts of Mubarak-appointed muftis conflicted with Egypt's conservative social norms and were met with public disgust. The former grand mufti Mohammad Sayyed Tantawi, for example, famously affirmed the religious legality of a sex-change operation if the subject had been declared incurably transsexual by a licensed psychiatrist. The fatwa was met with bewilderment and outrage; Tantawi spent the rest of his tenure defending his reputation.

In Gomaa the Mubarak administration must have seen an opportunity to correct its course. By appointing him grand mufti, it could both appease Egypt's increasingly restless business community and dampen the viral spread of Wahhabism in its streets. Gomaa's moderate and inclusive religious stance made him the perfect intermediary. By keeping him close, the administration has ensured that Gomaa has remained virtually silent with regard to government policy. Thus far Mubarak's choice has been successful: the mufti has become wildly popular. At his Friday sermons in Sultan Hassan more and more ex-Wahhabis in uncut beards and face veils can be seen gravitating toward the front of the crowd and laughing at Gomaa's jokes, reluctant converts to moderation. But greater tests lie ahead for the grand mufti. Many of his original followers are now successful businessmen, and their political clout is increasing.

Hamdi Sabri's company, Soft Salt, is the second largest salt manufacturer in Egypt, and another of the mufti's early devotees is a high-ranking executive at the United Bank of Egypt. As they and others of their cadre begin to pressure the government for privatization and tax reduction, the mufti may find his position more difficult. And as anger mounts over America's aggressive foreign policy in the Middle East, Gomaa will have to bring all his influence to bear to combat the appeal of anti-Western extremism. For now, however, Ali Gomaa is optimistic. He feels that an informed interpretation of Islamic law is the best defense of Islam, and of its people. "*Sharia is meant to protect Islam for Muslims, and protect the religions of all people who follow texts that proclaim the existence of God,*" he says.

“Sharia also aims to protect human dignity and human rights within the context of a global society and its stewardship of the earth. It forbids tyranny, prostitution, suicide, drug abuse—anything that reduces a human being to an object. Under all these rules and goals human beings can live out their lives, happy, safe, and at peace.”

http://www.ali-gomaa.com/?page=news&news_details=21

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2005/07/the-show-me-sheikh/4053/>

Chapter 12: Translated Articles by International newspapers

Mahomet lui-même ignorait la provocation

Source: *Lemonde.fr*

Il va sans dire que toute violence, qu'elle soit inspirée par des sentiments religieux ou des raisons laïques, doit être condamnée sans équivoque et avec la plus grande fermeté. Cela est conforme au meilleur de la tradition musulmane, qui abhorre les querelles confessionnelles, les conflits interethniques et les violences interreligieuses. Cette leçon s'inspire de l'exemple du prophète Mahomet lui-même, qui, alors que ses ennemis le soumettaient aux pires traitements, dédaigna toujours ces insultes et choisit à chaque fois la voie du pardon, de la miséricorde et de la compassion. C'est pour cette raison que les musulmans du monde entier l'appellent "la Miséricorde pour les mondes". En vérité, cet exemple est résumé par le Coran lui-même, qui exhorte ainsi les croyants : "La bonne action et la mauvaise action ne sont pas identiques. Repoussez la mauvaise action par une action meilleure."

Le monde a grand besoin de telles leçons, qui représentent l'authentique enseignement du Coran et du Prophète de l'islam. Il est important de distinguer ces nobles messages de ceux brandis par des gens qui n'ont aucune compétence en matière d'interprétation religieuse, d'herméneutique coranique ou d'histoire de la pensée islamique. Malheureusement, la situation actuelle du monde musulman est telle que les institutions et structures porteuses d'autorité légitime sont si affaiblies que les discours enflammés ont remplacé l'analyse réfléchie comme moyens d'incitation à l'action et comme guides du sentiment religieux. Aujourd'hui, nous avons un besoin urgent de dirigeants religieux sérieux qui affrontent la réalité du monde moderne - avec tous les défis et les difficultés qu'elle comporte - afin de créer un environnement dans lequel les hommes puissent coexister. Cela doit être un effort commun déployé par les membres de toutes les cultures et de tous les groupes religieux.

Le désir sincère de comprendre ce qui sous-tend la révérence des musulmans à l'égard du Prophète est un élément indispensable à un tel effort. Pour plus d'un milliard de musulmans à travers le monde, le prophète Mahomet représente l'exemple suprême.

Il est leur point de référence et, comme l'explique le Coran, "plus cher à leurs yeux que leur propre personne". Dans la conception islamique du monde, les prophètes sont les moyens par lesquels les hommes ont reçu l'enseignement de Dieu. Cela est tout aussi vrai de la succession des prophètes antérieurs à l'islam - parmi lesquels Abraham, Moïse et Jésus - que cela l'est du prophète Mahomet lui-même. Ce sont des maîtres révérés qui nous ont enseigné la nature même de la réalité, le but de notre existence et la façon de nous mettre en relation avec Dieu. C'est pourquoi les musulmans s'efforcent d'imiter l'exemple du Prophète dans tous les aspects de leur vie. Ils cherchent à assimiler profondément ses valeurs.

Celles-ci comprennent, entre autres, la capacité d'accueillir les provocations avec patience, tolérance et miséricorde. Ce sont là, pour les musulmans, des valeurs spirituelles de la plus haute importance, que la vie du prophète Mahomet lui-même illustre avec grande clarté.

Une anecdote le concernant est connue des musulmans du monde entier. Un de ses ennemis était une femme qui vivait dans une rue qu'il empruntait chaque jour et dans laquelle elle jetait des ordures avant son passage. Un matin, passant devant chez elle, il remarqua qu'elle s'était abstenu de le provoquer. Inquiet qu'elle ait renoncé à sa routine quotidienne, la seule réaction du Prophète, aussi difficile que cela puisse être pour lui, fut de s'enquérir de la santé de la femme. Les exemples du Prophète priant pour ses ennemis et affichant une fermeté inébranlable face aux insultes et aux provocations abondent dans la littérature islamique. Cela, sans nul doute, devrait être un idéal islamique. Malheureusement, tout le monde n'est pas capable de vivre en accord avec son idéal. Ce qui est clair, c'est que l'attachement des gens au personnage du Prophète n'est en rien diminué, même quand ils sont incapables, pour des raisons qui leur sont propres, de suivre les enseignements qu'il leur a dispensés.

Les musulmans considèrent les insultes contre le Prophète comme pires que des insultes qui seraient proférées envers leurs propres parents, leur famille, et même contre eux-mêmes. Le Prophète est un personnage sacré qui a enseigné aux musulmans comment vivre en ce monde, et dont la venue fut un don divin. Aussi, les récents documents qui visent manifestement à offenser les sentiments les plus profonds de plus d'un milliard d'êtres humains dans le monde ne font que contribuer à l'aggravation des tensions, et ne profitent à personne. Les musulmans doivent soit ignorer de telles provocations,

soit y réagir de manière non violente, dans les limites instaurées par leur religion. Ces limites ont de toute évidence été franchies au cours des derniers jours, c'est pourquoi les instances religieuses musulmanes ainsi que l'Eglise copte d'Egypte ont joint leurs voix pour appeler au calme et ne pas permettre que la situation s'aggrave.

Traduit de l'anglais par Gilles Berton

Ali Gomaa, Grand mufti d'Egypte

http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2012/09/24/mahomet-lui-meme-ignorait-la-provocation_1764596_3232.html

Muslime sollten die Provokation ignorieren

Source: Tagesspiegel.de

Es steht außer Frage, dass Gewalt jedweder Art, ob hervorgerufen durch religiöse Gefühle oder säkulare Interessen, eindeutig und schärfstens abzulehnen ist. Das entspricht bester muslimischer Tradition und dafür steht auch beispielhaft der Prophet Mohammed selbst. Obwohl ihm immer wieder von Feinden übel mitgespielt wurde, ignorierte er diese Beleidigungen stets und nahm stattdessen den Pfad von Vergebung, Gnade und Mitleid. Diese Lehre wird am klarsten vom Koran selbst verdeutlicht, der die Gläubigen ermahnt: „Die gute Tat und die böse Tat sind nicht gleich. Weise die böse Tat mit einer Tat zurück, die besser ist.“ Die Welt kann solche Lehren – die authentische Botschaft des Koran und des Propheten des Islam – derzeit gut gebrauchen.

Es ist wichtig, diese edlen Botschaften von jenen zu unterscheiden, die von denen unters Volk gebracht werden, die keine Ahnung von religiöser Interpretation, von der Auslegung des Koran oder der Geschichte des Islam haben. Leider ist die Situation in der muslimischen Welt derzeit so, dass die Institutionen und Strukturen legitimer Autorität so geschwächt sind, dass in religiösen Fragen die hetzerische Rhetorik die sorgfältige Analyse als Ratgeber ersetzt hat. Wir brauchen heute dringend ernsthafte religiöse Führer, die die Realität der modernen Welt anerkennen – mit all den Herausforderungen und Schwierigkeiten –, um ein Umfeld zu schaffen, in dem die Menschen zusammenleben können. Das ist eine gemeinsame Aufgabe für Mitglieder aller Glaubensrichtungen und Kulturen. Ein notwendiger Teil dieser Aufgabe muss darin bestehen, verstehen zu wollen, was hinter der Verehrung des Propheten durch die Muslime steckt. Für mehr als eine Milliarde Muslime auf der ganzen Welt ist der Prophet das größte Vorbild. Er ist ihr Referenzpunkt und ist, wie der Koran erklärt, „ihnen wichtiger als sie sich selbst“.

Propheten sind in der islamischen Weltsicht der Weg, auf dem die Menschen Wissen über Gott erfahren. Das gilt für die Abfolge der Propheten vor dem Islam – einschließlich Abraham, Moses und Jesus – nicht weniger als für den Propheten Mohammed selbst. Sie sind verehrte Lehrer, die uns die wahre Natur der Wirklichkeit erklären, den Grund unserer Existenz und wie wir uns mit Gott verbinden können. Deshalb versuchen die Muslime dem Beispiel des Propheten in

jedem Aspekt ihres Lebens zu folgen. Sie versuchen, diese Werte zu verinnerlichen. Dazu gehört, unter anderem, die Fähigkeit, gelassen, tolerant und gnädig auf bösartige Provokationen zu reagieren. Diese Werte sind, für Muslime, geistige Werte von allerhöchster Bedeutung, und sie werden beispielhaft verkörpert durch das Leben des Propheten Mohammed.

Das sollte das muslimische Ideal sein, darin besteht kein Zweifel. Leider ist es nicht möglich, dass jeder diesem Ideal gerecht wird. Klar ist, dass die Zuneigung der Menschen zur Person des Propheten unvermindert ist, auch wenn sie aus ihren ganz eigenen Gründen nicht in der Lage sind, den Idealen, die er gelehrt hat, zu entsprechen. Beleidigungen des Propheten werden ernster genommen als die der eigenen Eltern und Familie, ernster sogar, als wenn man selbst beleidigt würde. Der Prophet ist eine heilige Figur, der den Muslimen gezeigt hat, wie man in der Welt leben muss, und dessen Erscheinen in der Welt ein Geschenk Gottes ist.

In diesem Sinne trägt das hetzerische Material, das offenbar die tiefen Gefühle von über einer Milliarde Menschen beleidigen will, nur zur Eskalation der Spannungen bei, ohne erkennbaren Gewinn. Muslime sollten solche Provokationen entweder ignorieren oder gewaltfrei dagegen protestieren – in den Grenzen, die ihre Religion ihnen vorschreibt. Diese Grenzen sind ohne Zweifel in den vergangenen Tagen überschritten worden, und das muslimische Establishment wie auch die Koptische Kirche in Ägypten haben geschlossen zur Ruhe aufgerufen, damit die Eskalation nicht voranschreitet.

Der Autor ist Großmufti von Ägypten. Übersetzt von Moritz Schuller.

<http://www.tagesspiegel.de/meinung/andere-meinung/aegyptens-grossmufti-ali-gomaa-muslime-sollten-die-provokation-ignorieren/7155248.html>

Stormufti maner til ro

Source: Dr.dk

At forsvere profeten ved at angribe andre? Sådan lyder det undrende spørgsmål i overskriften på en ny kronik fra verdens største mufti, egyptiske Ali Gomaa. I kronikken tager Kairos stormufti stærkt afstand fra de voldelige handlinger, der den seneste tid har udspillet sig som reaktion på den meget islamkritiske film "Innocence of Muslims". Hvad enten volden er udløst af religiøse incitamenter eller sekulære interesser, så skal den utvetydigt fordømmes i kraftige vendinger, skriver Ali Gomaa blandt andet. Stormuftien henviser blandt andet til, at profeten Muhammed selv var utsat for dårlig behandling og fornærmelser fra sine fjender, men at han alligevel altid valgte tilgivelsens og medførelsens vej. Ali Gomaa citerer i den forbindelse et centralt koranvers, som siger, at den gode gerning og den onde gerning ikke er lig hinanden. - Modstå den onde gerning med en gerning, der er bedre, skriver stormuftien.

Klarog tydelig opfordring

I kronikken beklager Ali Gomaa den muslimske verdens nuværende tilstand, hvor "legitime", religiøse strukturer og autoriteter er blevet så svækkede, at eftertanksom analyse er erstattet af "opflammande retorik". Hvad angår provokerende materiale, som håner profeten Muhammed, så opfordrer muftien klart og tydeligt alle muslimer til at følge deres religion og ignorere provokationer eller reagere ikke-voldeligt på dem. - Den grænse er klart overskredet de seneste dage, og det bredere muslimske samfund og den koptiske kirke i Egypten står sammen om at opfordre til ro og dermed sikre, at situationen ikke eskalerer yderligere, skriver Ali Gomaa.

Mange dræbte

Den seneste tids uroligheder har blandt andet ført til, at USA's ambassadør i den libyske by Benghazi, Chris Stevens, blev dræbt. Otte udlændinge blev dræbt i en hævnaktion i Afghanistan, og i Indonesien kastede demonstranter benzinbomber mod den amerikanske ambassade i Jakarta, hvilket førte til, at en demonstrant blev skudt.

I alt har der været demonstrationer i mindst 20 lande, og urolighederne har kostet mindst 17 mennesker livet.

<http://www.dr.dk/Nyheder/Udland/2012/09/18/135923.htm?rss=true>

Fatwa-Rat für die Schweiz

Source: *Mediatenor.de*

Der Grossmufti von Ägypten, Ali Gumaa, ist eine der grössten Autoritäten gläubiger Muslime. Er empfiehlt er Schweizer Muslimen, einen Rat islamischer Rechtsgelehrter aufzubauen. Die Idee stösst auf Widerstand.

Von Daniel Glaus

Grossmufti Scheich Ali Gumaa empfängt im Fumoir. Der 58-Jährige mit weissem Bart, im langen, dunklen Gewand mit Nadelstreifen sitzt auf einem edlen Ledersofa neben einem Kamin, in dem Gasflämmchen züngeln. Das Hotel «Schwanen» in Rapperswil hat den Raucherraum eben erst in Betrieb genommen -die Luft ist rein. «Hello my friend», sagt Ibrahim, der Übersetzer und Bodyguard. Man startet mit Smalltalk über das herrliche Herbsrwitter. «Seine Exzellenz hat die Sonne aus Ägypten mitgebracht», scherzt Ibrahim.

Es ist der erste Besuch einer hohen Instanz des Islam seit der Annahme des Minarettverbots vor knapp einem Jahr. Scheich Gumaa hatte sich in den Abstimmungskampf eingeschaltet und gesagt, die Initiative verletze die Religionsfreiheit.

Nein zu Krieg ja zu Schweinefleisch

Der Grossmufti ist Vorsteher des Dar al-Ifta in Kairo. Das Gremium islamischer Rechtsgelehrter verfasst Farwas, Gutachten über alltägliche und grundsätzliche Fragen gläubiger Muslime. Ist Mädchenbeschneidung eine islamische Tradition? - Nein. Darf man im Krieg Massenvernichtungswaffen einsetzen? - Nein. Darf ein Muslim in einem nichtmuslimischen Land Schweinefleisch und Alkohol verkaufen?

- Ja.

Dürfen muslimische

Frauen ein Land präsidieren oder eine Firma leiten? - Ja. 3500 Fragen treffen jeden Tag beim Dar al-Ifta ein, aus Ägypten und der ganzen Welt. In der Washington Post erklärte Gumaa, dass «Dschihad» nicht für die Vernichtung von «Ungläubigen» stehe, sondern vor allem für den Kampf gegen das «niedere Ich»: «Der

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grosseDschihad ist der Dschihad der Seele.» In der Tilnes schrieb er, der Islam ermutige alle Menschen, «eine aktive Beziehung untereinander aufzubauen», die charakterisiert sei durch «Liebe und Respekt». In der Basler C-1 World Dialogue Fonndatioll setzt er sich für den «Dialog zwischen den drei abrahamischen Religionen» ein. Der «moderate» sunnitische Gelehrte ist das Gegenprogramll zu den schiitischen Mullahs im Iran und den Taliban. Ali Gumaa ist eine gewinnende Persönlichkeit. Ruhig und überlegt antworter er auch auf kritische Fragen. Während Ibrahim dieAntworten übersetzt, murmelt Gumaa leise, hantiert mit einer hölzernen Gebetskette oder zieht an seinen Fingern, bis die Gelenke laut knacken.

Natürlich babeihn dasJa zum Minarettverbot «enttäuscht», sagt Scheich Gumaa. Doch er sei überzeugt, dass die Schweizer anders entschieden hätten, wenn sie mehr Gelegenheit gehabt hätten, sich mit den wahren Werten des Islam auseinanderzusetzen. Das ist typisch: Nie würde er einen direkten Vorwurf aussprechen, Gumaa ist ein Diplomat. Aber sind die Muslime in Europa nicht mitverantwortlich für die Abwehrhalrung, die sich auch in anderen europäischen Ländern zeigt? Sind die Integrationsprobleme von Menschen aus ll1uslimischen Ländern nicht Realität? Fünfmal täglich beten bleibt Pflicht Nur einer von hundert Immigranten würde «nichts tun und Sozialhilfe empfangen», behauptet Gumaa. Alle anderen wollten arbeiten. Schliesslich sei es pflicht jedes Muslims, zu Wohlstand und Wachsm seines Gastlandes beizutragen. Wer das nicht tue, sei ein «Ignorant». Integration heisse aber nicht, seine Religion aufzugeben. So bleibe es auch Pflicht, fünfmal täglich zu beten oder als Frau ein Kopf tuch zu tragen. «Das Wichtigste ist, seinen Glauben an Gott zu bewahren, unabhängig von den Nachteilen, die einem daraus entstehen.»

Was heisst das für den Alltag der Muslime? Was bedeuten die wohlklingenden Sätze konkret? Darf die Tochter in der Oberstufe noch in den Schwimmunterricht? Verletzr ein Burkaverbot die Religionsfreiheit? Gumaa erreichen solche Fragen auch aus der Schweiz. Die Burka oder einandererVollsclieier sei ein religiöses Symbol, das kulturell geprägt sei, und im Gegensatz zum Kopf tuch keine Pflicht, sagt er. Gemischter Schwimmunrerricht ab der Pubertät sollte aber nicht obligatorisch sein. Eltern sollten ihre Kinder aus religiösen

Gründen dispensieren lassen können. Dass sein Gelehrtenrat in Kairo solche Fatwas für europäische Muslime erlassen müsse, hält Scheich Gumaa für nachteilig. Besser wäre es, ein Mufti vor Ort würde die Fatwa erlassen, um den ganzen gesellschaftlichen und rechtlichen Kontext besser beachten zu können. Deshalb würde er die Gründung eines Farwa -Rates in der Schweiz unterstützen, sagt Gumaa. Allerdings müsse die Initiative von hier aus kommen.

Mit diesem Angebot steht der «moderate» Grossmufti auf der Seite der Fundamentalisten. Ein Dar al-Isla fi.i.r die Schweiz gründen will nämlich einzig der radikale Islamische Dami t zeigt sich: Der Grossmufti, der sich in der arabischen Welt gegen Extremismus, Frauenvерstümmelung und Unterdrückung einsetzt und einen «Dialog» mit anderen Religionsautoritäten und westlichen Politikern führt, steht quer in der Landschaft, wenn es darum geht, Muslimen in Europa Ratschläge zu erteilen Paralleljustiz und Abschottung Den grundsätzlichen Widerspruch erklärt ein Landsmann Ali Gumaas: Politologe und Buchautor Hamed Abdel-Samad (<<Der Untergang der islamischen Welt» Weltwoche Nr. 39/10), der nach Deutschland ausgewandert ist. Er halte den Grossmufti für einen «anständigen Mann und gebildeten Gelehrten», sagt AbdelSamad, doch Gumaa sei ein Staatsbeamter denn der ägyptische Staatspräsident Hosni Mubarak ernenne ihn direkt.

Politik und Religion seien verbandelt. Gumaa, so moderat und modern er sein mag, stützt ein System, das die Definitionsmacht über den Alltag der Menschen hat - von der Art und Weise, wie man sich zu waschen hat, bis zur Frage, ob man vom «Glauben abgefallene Muslime» töten soll. Gumaa sagt dazu neinaber weshalb ist es nötig, dass eine religiöse Autorität dies klarstellt? Für Gumaa sind solche Fatwas gerade der Beweis, dass der Islam sich positiv entwickle. Sein Einsatz zur Ausrottung von «Traditionen» wie Mädchenbeschneidung könne «Ich kann nicht begreifen, warum Muslime so etwas in Europa brauchen.»

wirken, delU1 sein Wort habe Gewicht. Doch der Widerspruch zur liberalen, aufgeklärten Haltung bleibt: Das Denken, das Abwägen moralischer Fragen werden an einen Gelehrtenrat delegiert. Abdel-Samad, Sohn eines ägyptischen Imams, schockiert diese Tendenz: <<Ich kann nicht begreifen, warum Muslime so etwas in Europa brauchen. Begreifen sie nicht, dass die zivilen Gesetze der beste Schlitz

fü r sie sind?» Ein Patwa-Rat in der Schweiz wü rde die Türe öffnen für eine Paralleljustiz und zu einer stärkeren Abschottung der Muslime führen. Ausser dem IZRS distanzieren sich denn auch alle anderen wichtigen muslimischen Exponenten in der Schweiz vom Vorschlag eines Fatwa-Rates.

«Dass Herr Gumaa seine Hilfe anbietet, finde ich verantwortungslos», sagt Sai'da KellerMessahli, Präsidentin des Forums für einen fortschrittlichen Islam. Ein Fatwa-Rat kÖIU1e das Rechtssystem «unterhöhlen» und zugunsten einer «winzigen Minderheit» relativieren denn 11m etwa zehnProzenrder Muslim.e würden überhaupt nach den strikten islamischen Vorschriften leben.

Ali Gumaa bleibt dabei. Für ihn ist es selbstverständlich, dass sich ein Gläubiger an einen «Spezialisten» wendet. «Die Gläubigen wollen mehr über ihre Religion lernen und suchen Rat, damlr sie tun können, was der Islam von ihnen verlangt.»

http://www.mediatenor.de/pdf/AS2010Weltwoche_Gooma.pdf